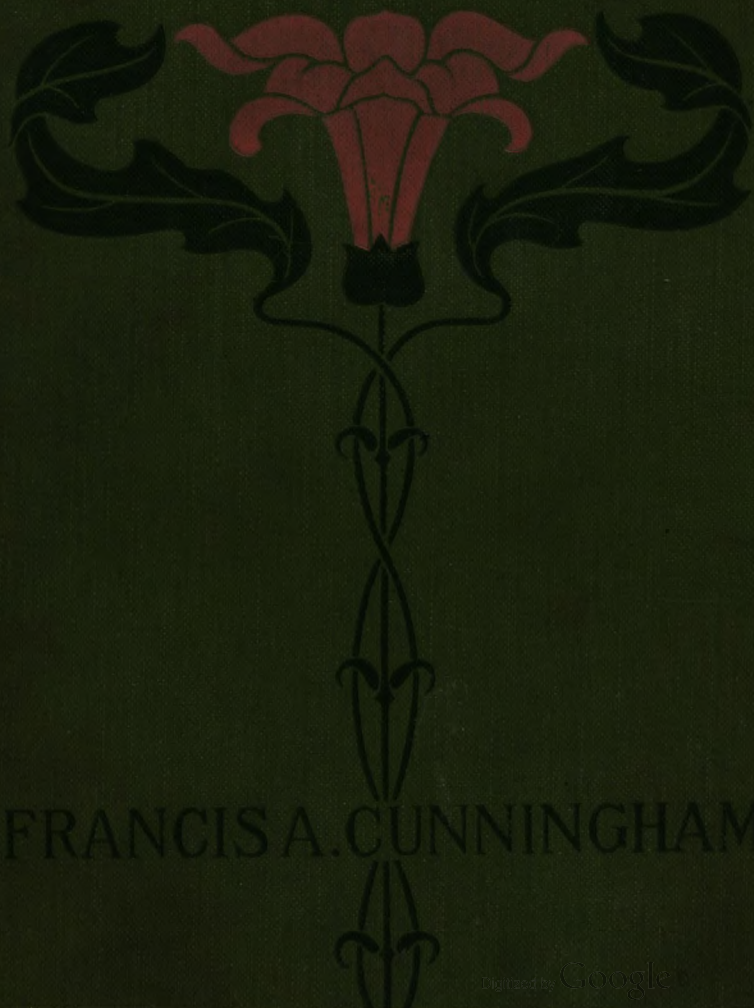

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THE AWAKENING



FRANCIS A. CUNNINGHAM

104
Roman Catholic
school.

Seventh Grade.

Prize for U. S. History and
Physiology, awarded to
Emmett Finucane.

Nazareth Hall,

June 24, 1902

West List # 221

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Shirley A. [illegible]

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By

Rev. Francis A. Cunningham



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CHAPTER I

THE festival was that of Pentecost. The great church of St. Placidus was thronged, yet not to the extent of causing discomfort, for an amiable band of ushers had so carefully performed their duty as to leave no one without a seat. The magnificent strains of the Gloria resounding through the quiet square gave evidence that the High Mass of the day was in progress.

The congregation was of a refined and fashionable order, made up as it was from the choice of Catholic wealth and culture, though there was also a generous sprinkling of that Protestant element which loves to haunt Catholic places of worship, charmed by the spell of beautiful music or the resonance of sincere preaching.

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The sacred edifice itself was a dream of architectural loveliness. It was modelled on the lines of the Roman basilica, wherein the profusion of glowing marble was toned into quietness by the general tint of olive intermingled with white and gold. There was a gorgeousness of pomp and ceremonial at the services of St. Placidus. A hundred altar boys flashed the brilliance of their scarlet robes over the red and gold of the priests' vestments, and the purer gold of the jewelled chalices and sacred vessels. The sanctuary choir was well worth being heard, though it yielded in strength and fulness to the great volume of voice that came from the organ-loft at the end of the church. "I am going to St. Placidus to hear the music," was a familiar observation on Barrington Avenue any Sunday morning, and one might be justified for such flippancy of speech when the character of the singing was brought into discussion. And so it was that with architecture, music, and ceremonial of the highest order there

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was but little to be desired in the attractiveness of St. Placidus. Even the preaching, the excellence of which was but a matter of chance, was generally in keeping with the surroundings.

This latter feature was looked for with certainty on the Feast of Pentecost. It had been announced the week preceding that the sermon of the day would be delivered by the Reverend Pastor, Father Daring, a man of wide prominence not more for his graces of oratory than for his repute as an ascetic. It is not strange, therefore, that many unfamiliar faces should be seen this day in the great church. Father McIntire, the celebrant of the Mass, felt a thrill of satisfaction as he glanced down the church during the Gospel and thought of the many souls there who had long been estranged from scenes such as this, and upon whom the nearness of the Real Presence might exert some salutary influence.

The Gospel was ended and Father

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McIntire with the deacon and sub-deacon at once proceeded in the usual ceremonial manner to the seats at the right of the sanctuary, while the congregation, with great rustling of silks and much unconscious coughing, disposed itself gracefully in the pews. Everything was in readiness for the preacher.

He came forth at length, just as the choir had begun the hymn of invocation to the Holy Ghost; and having reached the centre of the sanctuary he turned to the celebrant with a low bow; then facing the altar he knelt upon the step where he remained a few moments absorbed in prayer.

CHAPTER II

FATHER DARING appeared to have passed the scriptural limit of years.

He was a tall man, spare of build, with high cheekbones and long, thin lips. His abundant white hair, depending in uneven stretches from a massive crown, was brushed back with a ruthless scorn of fashion or order. Deep, dark eyes looked out from cavernous depths under eyebrows shaggy and overhanging. It was a handsome countenance withal, bespeaking candor, enthusiasm, and determination. His general appearance was at first sight forbidding and yet invited confidence from all seriously minded people.

He was spoken of as a good confessor and director of souls. He could listen with patience to the tales of woe that old women whisper into the bars of the sacred tribunal, and every irrelevant circumstance

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that would drive less kindly priests to scolding. He knew how to take up the aspirations of young people, and to propose methods of correction that seemed calculated to bring about the best results. His confessional was always thronged with penitents, young and old, ignorant and educated; and no one was ever known to leave its sacred shelter without a hearty "God bless you, Father!" and a wish to return as speedily as convenient. "Good Father Daring," they called him, for these and other more conspicuous virtues. His was the hand so often extended in loving aid to the needy; his the bright smile that beamed on the anguish of the sick-room; his the word of comfort to the bereaved.

Yet, kind to others, he was to himself unremittingly cruel, carrying out to the letter all those prescriptions which the ascetic literature of the Church offers to such as would crucify the flesh for the exaltation of the spirit. His food was of the sparest, his devotions the longest, and his

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study the most untiring. He was called the cultured priest by those who had delved into the fields of science, literature, and art; and many came to him in the afternoons to discuss points to which their own acquirements were insufficient guides. Beloved and admired, his very presence in the pulpit would cause a fluttering of hearts and an awakening of attention, even if there were not beyond that a natural eloquence that seemed like a breath of inspiration from above.

Father Daring had added to the acquirements gleaned from incessant reading that deeper fund of knowledge which comes from long experience in directing the heart and conscience. In the councils of his fellow-clergymen his definitions were accepted as final; in cases of conscience his solutions had the effect of law. A connoisseur in the arts, a lover and executor of good music, a critic of literary productions, he passed judgments that reflected the best sense of his time and marked him as a

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man of extreme culture and refinement. Yet he was not uplifted by the greatness of his gifts, seeming in the quietness and modesty of his conduct rather unconscious of the fact that he was in any way superior to his fellows, or even properly equal to them.

As he knelt before the altar his thoughts were far from the magnificence around him, scarcely affected even by the glamour of refinement and intelligence in so unusual an audience. He had prepared a sermon that he would have preached as readily to a gathering of farmers' families. His whole thought was of his subject and the order of its treatment. That once determined, he arose and with a stately bow to the celebrant, proceeded to the pulpit.

CHAPTER III

THE sermon turned upon the subject of Faith, which the preacher declared to be a gift of God. There were many other considerations under which he discussed the theme, but the whole strength of his oratory was expended upon the gratuitous nature of the virtue.

“As I glance through this great church,” he said, “I observe many in whose eyes there shines the light of a superior intelligence. Learned in art, literature, and science, in all the culture of the day, there seems to be nothing wanting in them that goes to make up perfect manhood. Yet I must say of them, and their own hearts will echo my thought, that the angels of God, as they look down from their celestial altitudes, behold them with glances of pity and commiseration, noting in them, as they do, the absence of that one essential

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jewel which would be the talisman of their acceptance with God. And I would say to them, with all the charity of a father : My dear children, you may be gifted in many natural ways, and you may thank the good God who has made you so. But you are wanting in Faith, without which your nature remains merely human ; with which you would approach more nearly to that likeness of the Divinity which originally adorned your souls. And what I most deplore is that you are blind, blind to this supernatural defect, and though you perceive its existence in more favored souls, your own ignorance of its true value leads you to esteem its possession rather degrading and pitiable than noble and uplifting. I would that God would open the eyes of your intelligence to perceive the blessedness of that light in order that the supernal happiness it brings might flood your souls with its exceeding sweetness.

“I have heard that you have declared you will not have the Faith. My children,

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the truth is, you cannot have it. You cannot have it because God does not give it to you. Pity not them, therefore, who possess it; rather pity the unworthiness in yourselves which disposes the good God to refuse you a boon in comparison with which all the wealth of earth is but ashes. Rather pray God so to adorn your hearts that you may sometime be made worthy of admission into the participation of a gift which is divine, inasmuch as it comes from the hands of Divinity."

So spoke Father Daring, in a voice that was clear, piercing, and resonant. The rest of the sermon was but a description of the object and motive of Faith, all of which was listened to with breathless interest. But the keen scorn of his opening sentences, piercing the pride of intellect in many a soul, left an impression of discomfort that clouded the great joy of the festival. Of those who walked out of the church that day, many said to themselves, "Perhaps I am to be pitied after all; I feel that I have

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no Faith." Their hearts were sad, and the beginnings of prayer were on their lips. As they reached the open air the palpable, breathing world spoke a different message, and Faith was forgotten in the exciting demands of fashion and pleasure.

CHAPTER IV

ONE heart drank in the pastor's words with more than ordinary eagerness. A lady of very distinguished appearance and apparent wealth waited for Father Daring, after the sermon, in the vestry.

"I am Madam Rogers," she said as the priest turned to greet her, after removing his stole and surplice. "I wished to come and thank you for the consoling words you gave us to-day. It is certainly a comfort to be informed even indirectly that one is upon the right path, especially when there is so much incentive in the world to wrongdoing and wrong-thinking."

"I am glad," the priest answered, toying with the tassel of his beretta, "that anything I have said could give you comfort, though, to tell the truth, I endeavored to preach only the severest doctrine. In fact,

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I feared that what I said might prove extremely distasteful, and I am surprised that any one should commend it."

"Oh, no doubt, Father, there are not wanting those who will criticise you as severely as you have censured them. But it is well that they should know, once for all, that their condescending ways towards those who profess the Faith are not in proper form. It may lead some of them to look into that religion which they affect so strongly to depreciate. But, Father, I ought to state my business at once; it is wrong to keep you waiting."

Father Daring motioned Madam towards a chair, while he himself took up a position beside the dressing-desk.

"There is a thing that troubles me, Father," she began. "It is in regard to my niece, the child of my sister who is dead. We have just come from Philadelphia, where I have been living with her and a younger sister of hers for the past year. I myself am a resident of New York.

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We are now living in the Glen Hill district, in the house of the late Senator Emerson. Perhaps you know the locality."

The priest nodded, and she continued: "I want to tell you of my niece. It may be that a little interest on your part will do much to aid her in the position in which she now finds herself."

"Is she, then, unwell?"

"Not at all, thank God! In fact her health is one of her greatest charms. But she is troubled at present with the strangest ideas. Let me tell you of her life. She has had a strange history for a girl of her age, and I am not surprised that her mind has been formed to ideals with which you and I have no sympathy. Miriam was the fruit of a mixed marriage. Her father was a prominent banker of Philadelphia, a handsome man, of the strictest honor, as that goes in the world. I have known him to perform works of charity that would be worthy of remark in a saint. With all that, he professed a decided dis-

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belief in revealed religion, reposing his whole soul in what he was pleased to term the unknown God. While my sister lived these strange theories of his had little influence over the mind of the child. She took to the beauties of the Faith quite naturally while loving and admiring both her parents as nature demanded. But my sister began to ail when the child was but ten years of age, and for five years went through the various degrees of decline in consumption. It was during these years that the heart of Miriam began to turn away gradually from the guidance of her mother and to lean towards the cold negations of her father. My sister's disease developed in her a certain querulous, petulant nervousness, which showed itself with special repugnance to the child whose mind could not grasp the influences that caused the change. She died while Miriam was in her sixteenth year, and the girl, over the yet warm remains, threw her arms about her father's neck declaring that her

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faith was now dead ; that for the future her mind should be the mind of her father his belief should be hers, his negations her negations and his God, her God. I saw the child but little since that day, though we have corresponded frequently. Her father died a little over a year ago, leaving Miriam in expectation of his immense fortune when she should come of age. That event arrived over six months ago. She received her documents and immediately came here to live."

"You are living with her, I presume."

"I have my own apartments in the house, though her mode of life gives us little opportunity of coming together. Her spirit of unbelief is now more strong than ever, and I am afraid that in this city of worldly culture her ideas, far from weakening may become all the more deeply rooted. I begged her to-day to come with me to hear your sermon ; but she refused, urging that she should only compromise herself by appearing in a church when she

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was known to be so strongly opposed to all religion. Oh, Father, how I wish she had been present to-day ! what you said seemed to suit her so aptly."

"But has the girl a good disposition?" the priest asked.

"The best in the world. Why, Father, Miriam is a perfect angel in that respect; so sweet, so modest, and so proper."

"I can scarcely conceive so much natural goodness apart from religion."

"But it is there, Father. I am sure that Miriam would not utter so much as a word intentionally that would give offence. It is her principles only that are harsh; but she seldom obtrudes them in my presence."

"Then you wish me to call upon her. Do you think she will receive me?"

"She will welcome any friend of mine. She is not at all bigoted. If you could come, and come soon, I should be pleased to prepare her for your visit."

"I can come whenever you like. Would this evening be convenient?"

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“Admirably. She is to have some little gathering after nine o’clock, but if you should come at seven you will have an opportunity at least for an introduction. After that you will know for yourself how best to act.”

The priest took from Madam’s hand the dainty card she proffered, and after reading upon it the name “Miss Miriam Elaine,” he slipped it quietly into his breviary. At the same time Madam Rogers arose and moved to the door, where Father Daring smilingly bowed her out.

CHAPTER V

AFTER his tea Father Daring set out upon his mission. He proceeded jauntily across the square and along the pavement of the Boulevard, his head aloft, his shoulders thrown back, and his cane swinging lightly in the air. A half-dozen intimate acquaintances claimed his attention with a nod or a smile, while hundreds of the poorer class doffed their hats or courtesied as he passed.

Within the space of a quarter of an hour he entered the ultra fashionable quarter, and a slight walk farther on brought him to the hallowed precincts of Glen Hill. His way led through one of those picturesque little woodlands for which the suburbs of the city were famous, where the houses were of a more than usually palatial character, hidden for the most part in nests of foliage.

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The Emerson mansion lay deep in the forest and was approached through a long avenue of elm and chestnut trees at the end of which it stood in white majesty, a beautiful casket in the midst of umbrageous surroundings.

When the great door swung open before the priest, a pompous servant in livery appeared like an apparition. There was a stare, half of terror and half of aversion, upon the features of the flunky as he comprehended the character of the visitor. Father Daring put him at ease at once by handing his card.

“Will you carry it to your mistress?”

The servant bowed low as if under some preternatural impulsion, but admitted the priest, and leaving the latter standing in the hall went to deliver his message.

Father Daring looked about him with a kind of indifference, but his quick eye in a single glance took in enough to satisfy him that his hostess was not only a woman of wealth, but more than all, that she pos-

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sessed tastes of the most refined and exquisite order.

The servant, in passing along the hall, had touched an electric button, and immediately the place was illumined with the brightness of daylight. The priest gazed about him in astonishment. A sense of unusual magnificence was impressed upon him. Through the whole length of the vast corridor he beheld an almost unlimited profusion of artistic masterpieces, both in painting and in sculpture. Pilasters of the renaissance supported superb cornices and formed the frame-work not only of the four doorways, but also of a series of frescoes representing scenes in country life. The ceiling was a representation of a fleecy sky where foamy clouds raced each other till they seemed to vanish into illimitable space; and, reaching far into and through this mimic empyrean, the great staircase arose like a realization of the dream of Jacob. In his admiration he half expected to behold the forms of angelic spirits as-

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ending and descending, and might have yielded to such imaginings but for the carnal atmosphere that breathed all around. Against the walls Diana rivalled Aphrodite and Cupid gambolled with Psyche. Feminine beauty looked out unabashed from statue and painting, staring him in the face with so much persistence that he was compelled at length to close his eyes.

It was during this temporary blindness to the spirit of his environment that the silken curtains at the end of the passage parted, and a figure paused a moment under their ample folds. Doubtless, at this very moment Father Daring was calling up before his mental eye the form he expected to meet. His ideas in regard to Miss Elaine ran into those which belong to the conventionally strong-minded woman, a young creature, perhaps with glasses, a sharp nose, thin lips, a mouth turned down at the corners, high cheekbones and hollow cheeks, with all that conformation or malformation of body

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which is supposed to accompany exalted cranial characteristics.

When, however, he opened his eyes at the sound of a silvery laugh, and looking up, beheld a radiant, supremely beautiful creature hastening down the hall to meet him, the shock to his fancies rendered his confusion overpowering. He could but rise and advance towards the apparition with extended hand.

“Father Daring, this is the consummation of all my hopes; I have heard such sweet things of you from my dear aunt that I was unhappy till I should see you.” And so she prattled on while her guest stood mutely gazing upon the vision before him.

Miriam was, indeed, worthy of admiration. Just entered upon the years of majority, there was a charm about her that seemed not to have resulted from any physical formation, but appeared rather as the external manifestation of that loveliness which is said to inform the pure spirit. It

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would be useless to describe the varieties and gradations of her physical appearance, except to say that she was all suffused, radiated, with a sweetness, a happiness, an intelligence rarely met with even in the most perfect of women. A robe of white muslin unadorned, save for a single rose, gave to her charms a finish in accordance with her own natural delicacy.

CHAPTER VI

WHILE she had been speaking the pair had moved almost unconsciously up the length of the corridor, and paused at length at the furthestmost door. She touched the curtains lightly and led her guest under their silken arch into the drawing-room. It was a large hall formed on the lines of a Roman aula, with fluted columns supporting a semi-circular ceiling, the whole ornamented in a style in keeping with the magnificence of the outer hall. All around it, in niches, were placed a number of marble busts, upon the features of which the priest fixed a glance full of astonishment and pain. No Greek gods or goddesses were there, charming by art if shocking by their superstitious suggestiveness. Voltaire led the lugubrious line, with Gibbon, Hume, Rousseau,

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Paine, and the representatives of kindred ideas; and before each effigy, as if before the shrine of some venerated saint, burned an ever-lighted lamp.

The thoughts of Father Daring, as he now turned a look of questioning upon Miss Elaine, were anything but pleasant. The consideration of his sacred calling and the high regard in which he was held by every one of his order contrasted badly with this strange encounter. A priest of God in the home, under the patronage of a woman from whose heart every sense of religion had been banished! What would be said of it? Not that he feared the wagging of inconsiderate tongues; but what evil example might not be engendered when this meeting should be noised abroad!

Father Daring was eminently a scrupulous man, tormenting his tender conscience on trifles, and worrying himself into nervous disquietude over peccadilloes. He felt that, after discovering the character and utter infidelity of this lady, to re-

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main a moment longer in her company would be in a manner to countenance her unbelief. He felt an impulse almost irresistible urging him to fly at once, even though in so doing he should seem to relinquish forever this beautiful soul to the destruction he saw so imminent. It was therefore with some show of nervousness that he brushed aside the hand extended to him, and, pushing into the hall, walked toward the outer door.

“Where are you going, Father Daring?”

He turned and beheld her standing white-faced against the wall as if overcome by the abruptness of his action. He came back and took her hands in his.

“You know why I was going,” he said. “I came here to recall you to God. I feared for the success of my efforts; indeed, I feared for myself. To gain you back to your duty would be my crown; it would be the happiness of my declining years; I could then die satisfied with life, ready for the hereafter. But to lose you without at

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least a trial on my part would be sad,—sad indeed.”

The priest's dejection was disturbed by the ripple of laughter that went echoing through the hall. It jarred upon his already overwrought nerves, and he turned sharply to her.

“My child,” he said, “you are jesting at holy things. What can you know of the anguish of a soul,—you to whom the soul is but the expression of non-existence?”

“Father,” she answered slowly and emphatically, gazing at the same time into his face, “Father, you must confess that I know just as much about such things as you or any living man.”

“Miss Elaine! you cannot mean precisely what your words imply.”

“I mean simply this: that you can know nothing of a future life, and I know nothing of the same. Nothing is equal to nothing, and so my knowledge in those respects is equal to your own.”

Father Daring smiled in spite of his dis-

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quietude at the little flavor of feminine pique that accompanied the words of Miriam. In fact, the spirit of the little woman softened altogether his incipient asperity.

“I see, Miss Elaine, that you are speaking merely for the sake of argument; your heart is not in your words.”

“On the contrary, I never spoke more sincerely, with more conviction. Tell me, Father; do you honestly know all that you teach with regard to a future life?”

“My belief is founded upon motives so strong that it is equivalent to the best of knowledge.”

“Still, it is not knowledge; it is only belief.”

“It is Faith.”

“Faith — that is another name for mere belief.”

CHAPTER VII

FOR answer the priest took into his the slender hand that lay upon his arm. "Come," he said, and led her to where an open window looked out upon the meadows. In the distance were the western hills, now but gloomy outlines against a sombre sky. The moon was just pushing its round disk from behind a mass of smoky clouds. Here and there a star glittered, or a meteor flashed for a moment. He pointed to the vast expanse of the firmament.

"Miss Elaine," he cried, "read! Read the pages of one of God's noblest books. Tell me, do you know anything of yonder starry expanse that contains more wonders than a man might count in a lifetime?"

"But, Father, I have not studied astronomy."

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“Nevertheless, you will not say that you are absolutely ignorant of all its teachings.”

“I know the ordinary facts in such matters.”

“You know the size of yonder heavenly body? its distance from us? You know the name and character of yonder planet?”

To these several questions Miriam answered in a manner that displayed a more than ordinary acquaintance with the study of the heavens.

“Ah, then,” the priest continued, releasing her hand and folding his arms, “tell me, how do you know these things?”

“I have learned them from my teachers, from reading, and from conversation.”

“In other words, you have accepted them upon the authority of others.”

“Well — but you know — ”

“In other words,” Father Daring continued, “you only believe them; is it not so?”

“Scarcely that. You must confess that

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the teachers of these sciences knew whereof they wrote and taught."

"Good! — and the teachers of the science of religion?"

Miriam struggled for an answer. Both she and the priest knew the sentence that was in her heart; yet she hesitated from uttering it for fear of the offence it might give.

"Pardon me, Father! I must say it. While the teachers of the natural sciences have proven their theories by personal experiment, the teachers of Christianity have never yet gone beyond the regions of pure belief."

"But, Miss Elaine, you will surely concede that the evangelists knew of what they wrote from personal experience."

"Let us grant it. But they lived so long ago, and, moreover, it is even doubted whether they really did ever live; in fact, it is doubtful whether the beginnings of Christianity are not after all a gigantic myth."

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“You believe that, Miss Elaine?”

“Yes, indeed, Father.”

“Then you accept one of the cardinal doctrines of your code merely on faith, that is, upon the word of another, even when the evidence is so overwhelmingly against you. You believe it although you know that such a theory has been expressly manufactured in order to injure Christianity, and not for the interests of truth. Moreover, you assert that the great men of science have declared such theory. That is wrong, as you will discover in looking into the religious beliefs of the really great scientists of this or any other century. And now tell me, my dear ; if you or your sect have a right to accept one kind of theory upon faith, why denounce us for claiming the same right in our own domain ? You will perhaps claim a difference in the character of the teachers. Indeed there is a difference, a vast difference. Tell me, who are they that proclaim your radical doctrines with the loudest voice ? Are they

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the cultured ones of society, — and by that I don't mean the silk and satin of the world, that polished ignorance which has taken money for brains, — but are they the scientist, the poet, the artist, the musician? If you will say yes, then let me ask you where is the great world-poet since the dawn of Christianity who has not believed in the Divinity of Christ? Where is the great world-painter, — I speak not of mediocrity, but greatness, — the architect, musician, or scientist who has not taught the falseness of your theories? I speak only of those who would commend themselves to you for the mere material greatness of their gifts. I speak not of saints, of virgins, or of martyrs. And yet even the great material human genius of the world is a teacher of Christianity, against whom you would place — what? Philosophers who have themselves declared the insufficiency of their own systems, whose theories, at first fair in appearance, have led the world on with quick strides towards its ruin. Tell

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me, was it Christianity that gave birth to these monsters of the modern social fabric, the Nihilist, the anarchist, the communist, the Mafia? You cannot answer in the affirmative, for behind every one of them you see the beady eyes and the long nose of the unbeliever, who hopes to wring gold out of the blood that fools will shed for them in war. Such are your teachers, whether they live in homes of luxury, or in the vile beer-dens of the king-killers in some country village."

It was seldom that Father Daring had ever permitted his emotions to carry him as far as on this occasion. His mode of pleading was usually of the gentlest and most persuasive character. This evening he had found himself in a most unusual position. He looked upon Miriam, not as one born into a state of unbelief, not even as one to whom the tenets of religion were made difficult by reason of environment, evil example, or persecution. He considered her as still a child of the Church, upon

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whose soul the cleansing waters of Baptism had flowed, bearing with them obligations which no manner of apostasy might dissolve. Infidel in sentiment and life, she was yet a Christian by virtue of the bonds assumed in her cradle, and as such she came under the spiritual direction of that Catholic pastor under the shadow of whose church she should find her home.

It was therefore from a sense of duty towards a wayward and wilful child that he assumed in conversing with her a tone of reproach. That his words had stricken home he felt confident, as he looked upon her frightened face and trembling hands. She sank down with a convulsive sob into a chair and covered her face.

"You will pardon me," he said, "for the pain I have caused you, my child, knowing as you must the sincerity and truth of my words."

She brushed the tears from her eyes with a nervous hand, and stood up once more.

"Oh, Father," she cried with a little

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laugh, "how could I expect you to speak any differently upon a subject which has been the theme of your whole life. You have indeed, impressed me, but the impression is too violent, too sudden to be lasting. I am not a creature of caprice, much as you may imagine it; yet I am confident that in the school of my every-day friends I shall meet with many an answer to your scornful challenge. You have interested me beyond my power of telling; but do not flatter yourself, my dear Father, that you have converted me by any means."

There was so sweet a ring in her voice and so bright a twinkle in her eye as she uttered her little defiance, that both she and the priest laughed at the humor of it.

"Well, well!" he said as they walked down the hall towards the door, "perhaps it is a case where the grace of God and incessant prayer will do more than all the preaching in the world."

She did not answer, but as they stood in the open doorway, she bent quickly and

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impressed a hasty kiss upon the aged hand that was laid in her own. There was no explanation of the action ; there was merely a murmured "Good-night," and the priest was gone.

Miriam looked after his retreating figure with a sense of mysterious fascination, and then, with a little sigh of relief, she closed the door and went back to her evening occupations.

CHAPTER VIII

THE dreams of Miriam during the night were not uninfluenced by her evening's experience. She had retired under a spell half of depression, half of self-contentment. There had arisen in her memory incidents long forgotten in the hurly-burly of social excitement, the few years of her childhood at the Sacred Heart convent, her Holy Communion, her Confirmation. Visions of the gentle nuns, their beaming countenances surrounded by the white fringe as by a halo, the dear old priest who had listened to her story in the quiet of the Confessional, and above all, the deep peace of soul that hung about her like an ægis of protection, — she remembered them all as she tried to close her senses in the calm of sleep. But they haunted her in dreams, weird, ghostly appearances alternately beck-

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oning with smiling features, alternately repelling with countenances full of loathing and horror.

In the morning as she arose with a dull aching of the head, and opened the shutters, a new feeling entered into her heart with the flooding light of the opening day.

"I cannot conceive how I permitted myself to be so easily overcome," she mused. "It is strange what cowards the night can make of us!"

Geoffrey Daunt came that morning with his coupé, and they went for a drive. She mentioned to him her little adventure of the night before, and asked what he thought of it.

"He is a fanatic, like all priests," he said.

"But, Geoffrey," she exclaimed as if in dissent, "you can scarcely term a man such as he is a fanatic! You must remember, he bears honors from a dozen learned societies, and he is the most eminent geologist in these parts."

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“Fanaticism can co-exist with learning, even with genius. It is not a matter of education, it is rather a temperament, an inherent disposition. Education can do much to mollify its ferocity; it scarcely ever eradicates it.”

“Still, Mr. Daunt, I refuse to apply such an epithet to Father Daring. Mistaken, he may be, but fanatic — never.”

Geoffrey Daunt laughed to himself. He shrugged his shoulders as if the question had but little interest for him anyway, and began to discuss another matter.

Geoffrey was one of the successful business men of the city. Inheriting an ample fortune from his father, he had by his own luck and his mother's shrewdness contrived to double what had primarily come into his hands. That most of his new wealth owed its existence to extensive dealing in the stock market was a well-known observation on the street, nor did he in any way seek to conceal or excuse his hazardous ventures. It was he who

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originated the phrase, "In the lottery of wealth, only fools will be honest," — an expression, however, which by no means gave one the right of formally questioning his professed integrity.

If you were to ask him about his religious preferences you might receive one answer or another according to circumstances. There was a time during the winter before the last when he was found one Sunday in the front pew of the Episcopal church in New York; it was when he desired the name of the minister upon a document of some political importance. His love for religion during that spell had a life of just three days, so that, when he returned to his native home at the conclusion of the transaction, he had forgotten the idea of God or the things of God. His official religion was that of Mammon, and he would not pretend to serve two masters. His comprehensive article of creed was enunciated in the words, "Do good unto others at one

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hundred per-cent on the dollar," — a pleasant doctrine when the interest accrued promptly.

One should not infer from this that he possessed either the appearance or the disposition of a miser, for he was known to have contributed largely to public charities, provided such contribution might serve as an advertisement for his wares. Handsome as any young man of the day, he had learned the art of concealing his belief under an exterior bonhomie that was most captivating. Men pointed him out as an example of mercantile honor, and he was once even invited to address a public school upon the topic of "Honesty in Business," — a task in which he acquitted himself so well as to deserve the full publication of his speech in all the newspapers of the following day, together with extended anecdotes displaying his well-known adherence to the principles so ably advocated.

He was in his thirtieth year, and be-

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coming weary of the makeshift existence of bachelor life,—a weariness that was intensified by his mother's frequent hints and uncomfortable observations,—he began to think seriously of a change. Marriage offered him a haven of rest provided it might be attained upon the conditions he had so often rehearsed before his mother.

“If I marry, mother dear,” he had said, “I must find a wife without a family. I hate people-in-law. She must be wealthy, beautiful, cultured, healthy, and young. You say that such a being does not exist outside the fairy tales ; if so we must construct one.”

The vague ideas of wifely perfection entertained by the young man were realized almost entirely in the person of Miriam Elaine, whom he chanced to meet shortly before at one of his mother's receptions. Young, wealthy, pretty, cultured, and unmarried, what more could he wish for ! Of course the idea of love had not entered

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into his category. Yet when he first set eyes upon her his own heart was bound at once as it had never been bound before. He could not say whether his affection was reciprocated; what cared he for that if only he might be able to look upon her as his own?

What pleased him most in Miriam was her conformation of mind; it appeared so singularly like his own in many respects. Only in the matter of finance did she seem unequal, and he wisely deemed that in a wife to his liking a want in this particular would prove an advantage. Her tastes in literature fell in with his own to such an extent that they could thus find abundant material to fill out with conversation the many hours they spent together. They had both read the works of the French atheistic writers, she in the original and he in many translated extracts. She could recite many passages of Shelley, to which he would listen with rapturous attention. She could

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not, however, agree with him in his liking for the pornographic writings of Zola and his imitators, which she described as dream pictures taken from the delirium tremens resulting from overdoses of absinthe and whiskey. With both, the spirit of opposition to revelation and to religious forms had developed into a passion.

"There is a charm," Daunt had said, "in this freedom from subservient bowing to authority. I love to stand forth in the glorious sunlight, to swing my arms freely and to feel that there is no one who dares hinder my intelligent action."

"Intelligent action, Mr. Daunt," she said, "is an equivocal expression. Its meaning depends altogether upon the individual by whom it is exercised."

"Surely intelligence can mean nothing but what is right?"

"That is true. But even right is equivocal. What is right to me may not appear so to you."

"And therefore? —"

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“And therefore, Mr. Daunt, one ought to respect the opinions of others. There may be a truth in the most strangely seeming doctrines which we may be too blind to observe.”

CHAPTER IX

THEY were bowling along at a good pace through one of the narrow streets that led from the Boulevard towards the Park. It was in the poorer section of the city, where immense wooden tenement-houses shelter their thousands of struggling and suffering inhabitants. Twelve o'clock had sounded from a dozen factory bells and whistles a few moments before, and the sidewalks were now swarming with a moving mass of men, women, and children hurrying to their frugal dinner. In the midst of their onward progress they became suddenly aware that the street in front was about to become impassable by the gathering together of the crowd. Safety demanded that they should moderate their rapid pace, and they finally found themselves obliged to proceed at a slow walk.

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A moment's observation showed them the cause of the delay. Against the pavement on the side of the street a patrol wagon had drawn up, from which were alighting two sturdy guardians of the peace. The latter found waiting for them another officer, who held in his custody one of the most deplorable cases of drunkenness it had ever happened to Miriam to behold. A ragged, befouled mortal, stupidly leering, staggering in the arms of his captor, was unceremoniously lifted and thrown like so much beef into the wagon, where, propped up between two of the bluecoats, he gazed sheepishly upon the crowd.

Suddenly, as he looked before him, there came into his eyes an appearance of brightness. His head arose to something of military rigidity, his right hand went up and lifted the disreputable rag that served him for a cap.

"Mornin', Father!" he said; "proud to meet yer."

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Directed by his glance as well as by the words which rang clearly across the street, the occupants of the stylish carriage turned to where an aged clergyman was threading his way along the sidewalk. There was a twinkle of amusement in Father Daring's eye as he heard the greeting that came to him from the patrol wagon, an amusement which communicated itself to all the on-lookers. The priest passed quickly away from the conspicuous professor of friendship, and was soon lost in the distance. The hurry-up wagon, after a hitch and a turn, dashed with banging gong up the street, and the crowd quickly dispersed.

Miriam and Geoffrey glanced meaningfully at one another, and with a sigh of relief ordered the carriage to proceed.

"Do you know, Miss Elaine," he ventured as soon as they again came to a clear road, "I consider a scene like that one of the best object lessons in modern life. Consider those people, the lives they lead, their low ambitions, their brutal passions,

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their abject poverty, and their religion. It would be no idle venture to say that ninety-nine out of every one hundred of them are Catholics ; you might guess that from their excessive deference to the priest. What an exhibition of fawning servility in beings who are supposed to possess the gift of intelligence ! And what a difference in the life we lead, our aims, ambitions, associations, and our progressive wealth ! Does it not appear as if their own God, in mockery of their degrading beliefs, had hurled upon them the curse of poverty and shame ?”

Miriam had nothing to answer. Her thoughts were upon other things.

“And think for a moment,” Geoffrey continued, “what it finally means, when coupled with the assumption so often advanced by their clerical teachers, that such a church is holy. Holy !” He laughed as if the idea possessed untold depths of humor. “Holy drunkards, holy thieves, robbers, burglars, and prison-birds.”

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It must be confessed that Miriam felt a great repugnance to the bitterness of her companion. It was therefore with something of irritation that she answered him.

“How little do men of your stamp know of such people!—you, in your homes of luxury and wealth, where nothing is wanting to satisfy the smallest wish. You have not known the pangs of hunger, the fierce chill of the wintry cold, the long hours of weary, incessant labor. Of course it is more respectable for men and women to walk about with dignified step, clad in silk or broadcloth, and to speak in accents soft and low; it is so unpardonable to lift the voice or to speak with animation. But ah! we have money enough for that; these people have not. They must struggle to live; for them every moment means a bite to eat, an infinitesimal guarantee of peace. Moreover, they are the millions; we are the few, and if your own principles can be borne out to a logical conclusion, you must confess that we hold in our hands

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the money, the comfort, the peace that of right belong to those same people. Give them back what you have so often declared belongs to them, and you will see that the intelligence, honor, and morality hidden beneath their rough clothing and rude manners will begin to display itself more brilliantly than our own."

While she was speaking, the young man was so deeply interested in her words that he did not notice a sudden appearance in the road just before them. It was a party of little children playing a game of marbles. In a moment the carriage and horses would have been upon them, making a holocaust of the young lives. Miriam, glancing forward, saw in a flash the terrible danger, and screamed to the careless driver. It was too late to check the horses, which were plunging onward with frightful impetus.

But relief was nearer at hand than they imagined. Out of a doorway, clad in his surplice and stole, Father Daring appeared and dashed with the quickness of a youth

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upon the raging horses. He caught the bridle, and with an effort that called forth all his strength pulled the team to the right, thus giving the horses a direction that led them away from the playing group. The escape was of the narrowest. As it was, the wheel of the coupé in passing caught the dress of one of the children and dragged the little one a few feet along with it. The sudden energy of the priest had done its work, and he was about to return to the business of his sick call in that humble home, when he recognized the voice of Miriam as she poured out her words of gratitude. He smiled back his acknowledgment and with a little gesture, pointing to his sacred vestments, as if pleading to be excused from present explanations, went back to the sick-bed.

"There, Geoffrey," she said, when they were again safely upon the road, "there is a Catholic, and if you know a nobler man in all the world, I should like to see him. He would be a great curiosity to me."

CHAPTER X

WHEN Miriam returned from her drive she dismissed her escort, pleading a violent headache as an excuse for quiet and rest. Her headache was of the kind that quarrels with sleep, and so, although she threw herself upon the lounge in her room and closed her eyes, her imagination remained ever awake and at work. A thousand and one flitting reminiscences of the day crossed her mind, twining and intertwining themselves, and ever leading back, as by so many devious ways, to the one absorbing thought of her soul.

She had in the past reared for herself a fabric of apparent beauty, a sort of religious code built upon the negation of a personal God, a morality which rested upon the mere promptings of nature, a ceremonial in which kindness was to be the sole

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cardinal virtue. And when in the fulness of her pride she had looked upon her edifice she imagined that it was wanting in nothing. Her friends had examined its different features with critical eyes, and had pronounced them faultless in conception and arrangement. And yet, since her encounter of the night before, and the events of the present day, it seemed as if the charm had passed away, leaving her work like a cold, corpse-like relic.

She tried to account for it in the illusions of a brain weary with thought, and fancied that the balmy influence of rest would bring back the old freshness to her dreams and awaken once again the fairy-like perfection of her ideals. But ever there recurred to her soul, like the regular beating of a clock in the silence of the night, the thought that, after all, this universe of her creation might be but a flimsy structure of the fancy, such as children build up in their moments of play. She had not yet considered that, still more desolating, such a fanciful edi-

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fice reared up within her mind was concealing from the eye of her intellect that other more real creation that came from the hand of the Almighty, the gleaming of whose eternal brightness came at times upon her, piercing even through the denser and awkward fabric of her own making.

She lay for an hour turning over and over in her mind every conceivable reason for the continuance of her long-cherished theories, but ever confronted by an obstacle that seemed to render her efforts futile. What this interior sentiment, voice, influence — call it what you will — might be she could not guess. She only knew that it shed about her affinities, especially her irreligious literature, an atmosphere of chilling coldness; it impressed upon the features of her anti-Christian heroes a weird, surly aspect that filled her with repulsion. At the same time there seemed to be a presence around her the existence of which made itself felt the more her thoughts receded from the influences of

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her late life. At length in a fit of nervous excitability, she sprang to her feet, and with arms outstretched and face uplifted cried : —

“ O God, if thou be living, take this life of mine ! — this struggle in the dark, this hopelessness, this despair, and give me what thou wilt, — only give me peace, — peace, eternal peace ! ”

She fell forward upon her face. Fortunately the force of the fall was broken by a pile of soft couch-pillows which had tumbled to the floor when she first sprang from their midst. She lay there, not unconscious, not hysterical, but completely overcome. Her eyes were closed, her hands clasped over her forehead, and her face turned to the wall. She grew quieter from moment to moment, and was nearly lapsing into sleep when the door of the chamber opened and a girl stepped timidly in.

“ Oh, Miriam ! ” the new-comer cried, starting back in alarm as she perceived the prostrate form upon the floor.

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Miriam raised herself wearily, and sank down again upon the couch.

“Don’t worry, Florence,” she said holding out her hand in invitation. “I had a little accident. I am feeling better now.”

The cheery tone reassured the girl, who though yet pale from the fright, hastened to the side of the woman and nestled close up to her. Miriam stroked the flowing hair, and lifting up the childish face kissed it affectionately. But the look of inquiry had not yet left the countenance of the new-comer, who seemed to wait in expectation of some explanation.

“Darling,” said Miriam, at length, “you must tell me how you have done at the art school to-day;” and then the younger one related in her eager way the various little happenings that loom up in the life of childhood with an importance all their own.

CHAPTER XI

FLORANCE ELAINE was three years younger than her sister Miriam.

She was one of those delicate, frail things that seem as if made of a mixture of the mist and the sunshine, an ethereal being, pallid, slender, and wide-eyed. A hasty observer, knowing her history, would have said she inherited the disease of her mother.

She had strange fancies, this child, as who would not if obliged to live a life almost from infant years under the tutelage of so strange a being as her sister? She had had an education of her own under tutors who, while instilling into her mind the usual lessons of youth, had, more than all, endeavored to create within her their own abhorrence of religious ideals. And so she was taught to regard the God of the Christians, the God of Moses and the Prophets as the expression of the extremest

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cruelty. For this reason those passages of the Holy Scriptures which related the awful punishments that men brought upon themselves through their yielding to criminal propensities were often divested of their context and related without any reference to the crimes that made them necessary. She had been educated to the belief that it was this God who, with omnipotence for good, was yet pleased to look with tranquillity upon the sufferings of men, while they neglected to show her that suffering is but a golden opportunity afforded by God to man whereby he may merit the rewards of another and greater life. So too she was taught the doctrine of Hell with its most appalling features, and called upon to contemplate the Creator of the world as exulting in the eternal torments of helpless victims. That there are depths in the mysterious dispensations of divine Providence was never explained to her, and thus, when the very idea of Divinity had become associated in her mind with

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every suggestion of horror and repugnance, it was an easy matter to proceed to the more pleasing doctrine of the non-existence of God, with all the other theories which would thence follow.

But, whether it be that the human mind instinctively shrinks from such wholesale perversion of truth, or that there remained within her some inherited appreciation of a supernatural order, the soul of Florence was slow to accommodate itself to the efforts of her teachers. She had never yet been able to formulate to herself any proper conception of the nature of God, or any idea of His attributes; yet, out of the very bitterness of the hostility manifested against His Name, she had begun to conceive a certain reverence, a yearning to know more of that mysterious Being whom her teachers had seemed to create only for His annihilation. Oftentimes she had expressed her feelings to her sister only to have them set aside with a gentle reproof. Finally she had lapsed into a

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condition of indifference wherein even the ordinary faculties of the mind had grown dormant. She began to fail in health, going steadily downward until she had reached the stage of invalidism in which we have found her.

The thought of all this now flashed through the mind of Miriam, but it brought with it no element of consolation. She could not yet reproach herself for the influence she had brought to bear upon her sister, but she began to feel that all her efforts had been expended in a doubtful cause. The consideration of the awful consequences that must follow from her fantastic theories had not caused her a moment of worry. Yet she felt ill at ease, though for what, she could not say.

And so she pressed the pallid face with its soulful eyes closer to her bosom.

"Florence," she said, at length, "I am going to take you upon a strange call this afternoon. We will pay a visit to the priest. No! Do not look startled. We

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have nothing to fear. He is a very, very good man, and a friend also of Aunt Mary."

"But, Miriam, he is a Catholic! Why, a Catholic priest is a — a — Is not a priest really one of the most wicked of people? You used to tell me so."

"Yes, Florence; but I have found one who is truly good, — in fact, better than any man I have ever known. You must not trouble your little head about what has been told you in that regard. You are growing to be quite a woman now, and and I am resolved to let you learn henceforth in your own way. I am afraid your uncongenial studies have made you ill. But we will discuss that some other time. Come, we will make ourselves ready for this call, and while I am engaged will you please run up to Aunt Mary and tell her you and I are going to visit the priest?"

She kissed her sister affectionately, and the latter proceeded immediately upon her

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errand, wondering what strange thing had come upon Miriam to cause the accident of the afternoon and, above all, that resolution to venture into what she would hitherto have regarded as a veritable lion's den, the home of a priest.

CHAPTER XII

MADAM ROGERS received the intelligence with a beating heart. Florence had surprised her in the recitation of the Rosary, a prayer that always had for its object the conversion of the being dearest to her upon earth. The strange news brought by her niece made her imagine that her prayer had been answered, and she was about to cast herself again upon her knees in thanksgiving when it occurred to her that she might be mistaking her wish for an actual fact. Nevertheless, she murmured a prayer for grace to the Sacred Heart and hurried to Miriam to learn what it might mean.

She found her niece in the act of adjusting her gloves, while Florence sat upon the bedside propounding interminable questions. Madam entered the room with eyes swim-

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ming in tears and took the hands of her niece into her own.

“Tell me, Miriam, that it is true.”

“Aunt Mary,” Miriam replied, “I am going to call on Father Daring; but I would not have you build up unwarrantable hopes upon such a meeting. I told you last evening how deeply that dear old man impressed me, and I am anxious to cultivate his acquaintance. I would not discourage you either; but I must say that if Father Daring cannot bring me the light that will guide me out of my entanglements, I must be content to abide by my old way of life. You may be sure, Aunt Mary, that I shall not accept any assertion that cannot bring complete conviction.”

“I know it, my dear,” Madam answered. “I fully concede that you have founded your beliefs upon serious study. But if you could only understand I should tell you that the knowledge of God, being of a supernatural order, is acquired only through supernatural means. Faith is a gift to be

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obtained only through prayer and good works."

"I know what you would say, auntie dear," she broke in with a little impatience; "those expressions have grown trite and commonplace. As I am constituted they mean absolutely nothing. I must see — see something — something that can tell me all the rest. What is that, auntie?"

"I am sure I do not quite comprehend. It has happened in times past that God has sent extraordinary signs to men by which they might come to the light of His goodness and power. Such was the sign of the Star of Bethlehem, and that of the Cross of Constantine."

"That is what I mean," Miriam exclaimed with enthusiasm. "That is just it. If I could but feel some palpable manifestation of the existence of God and of His goodness, then there should be no more difficulty. But alas! we are not now in the age of Constantine or of Augustus Cæsar."

"No, Miriam, we are living in a very

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prosaic age. But the same God who made extraordinary events possible in the days of old still lives, as mighty, as bountiful, as generous as ever. Go, then, Miriam, in God's name ! and I am sure that since you so much desire it, the good God will look with favor upon the natural goodness of your heart and lead you to Himself in the vision of truth."

Miriam left the room silently with Florence. She had not even heard the last words of blessing bestowed by her aunt, and in a moment more she was seated comfortably in her carriage.

CHAPTER XIII

AS they rolled over the streets the sisters observed an almost continual silence, broken only by some passing observation or some reassuring word of endearment. To Florence the whole event promised something of adventure, with its setting of mystery and its premonitions of danger. Miriam, on the contrary, was actuated by a sense of heroic determination; she was about to stand upon the brink of the Rubicon, even though she should never cross it. Yet that in itself presented innumerable terrors. What if there should be forces upon that brink which could impel or drag her over to the other side whence there should be no return? And then, her position in society! her friends who had so grown into her life as to have become almost a part of it!

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Could religion produce some sweet substitute for all she might lose?

Then came the sense that such timidity was not only foolish, but cowardly. It was not necessary, she reflected, to make religious inquiry the object of her call; could it not be a mere return for the visit the priest had paid her the evening before? And so there was a smile upon her countenance as she drove up to the parochial residence. Father Daring, who had seen them from afar, was waiting in the open vestibule and received them with words of the warmest welcome.

He led them into the little parlor, where they sat chatting agreeably for some time, during which the priest could not help noting that he had created an even more favorable impression upon the younger than upon the elder sister. Florence was herself unconscious that her conduct could be the subject of thought to so mysterious a being as this priest, and so she had moved about the room while the others were conversing.

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All the while, however, she was imperceptibly attracted as by a magnetic influence towards the black-gowned host. She paused finally when she arrived at his side. He was then addressing Miriam and seemed unaware of the presence near him. The conversation interested the young girl just then, and in her abstraction she seated herself upon the low stool at his feet. In a moment more she was leaning against his knee, her head pillowed upon his great shaggy hand, and her eyes fixed upon his countenance with a gaze full of affection and admiration.

They had been speaking of the progress of Catholicity in the city, a subject upon which the priest was thoroughly conversant, having come into the ministry when he was the only priest for miles around. He had a fund of reminiscences, pathetic, humorous, and tragic, which seemed to flow from his tongue as if the recollection of them were ever in his mind. It had been the intention of Miriam to lead away as

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much as possible from the discussion of doctrinal topics, and Father Daring, on his part, avoided any such movement until she herself should signify her readiness to engage in it. Much, however, was said before the visit ended that put Catholic ideas before her mind indirectly, but with more force than if they had been proclaimed in exact words.

He led them out to the church as to the principal object of interest in the vicinity. As he passed before the Blessed Sacrament she was not surprised when he knelt devoutly and murmured some inaudible words of prayer. She felt as if she too would have liked to fall upon her knees beside him and pour forth, as in her days of childhood, the story of her soul to God; and a tear welled from her eyes as she stood propped up by her pagan pride, gazing awestruck upon that Tabernacle wherein reposed the sacred Presence which she had given her life to oppose.

They passed through the empty church,

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speaking in undertones, as if there were in their inmost hearts a conviction of unseen dwellers, angels that hovered in silent majesty over the spiritual treasures that a generation of believers had gathered together in that holy place.

CHAPTER XIV

THEY seated themselves in the gloom of a lordly transept that they might the more easily feast their eyes upon the beauty of the temple. Father Daring begged them to remain there awhile, as he wished to go into the organ loft. The shadows of twilight were beginning to close around, veiling some parts of the church in a semi-darkness. From the recess of the altar a single faint, red light glowed, casting a thousand minute sparkles upon the cut-glass pendants of the chandeliers or upon the burnished brass of the candlesticks that filled the sanctuary.

There was a moment of hushed recollection, every sense of the visitors being strained in an ecstasy of admiration and wonder. Then there came down from the farther end of the church the sound of the immense organ. At first it was a

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succession of chords, slow and solemn, and gliding one out of another as if voices of imprisoned souls were striving to make themselves audible to the waking world. The chords dissolved themselves gradually into lesser and finer harmonies, dying away finally into a single thread of melody. Now the fingers of the player seemed to drop from the keys showers of tones that fell upon the ear like the silvery sound of a fountain scattering its dewy drops about in tuneful profusion. And when the soul had imbibed its tender sweetness, then arose a motive full of piteous pleading, a yearning cry like that a mother utters when she stretches out her arms to the child that is being borne away. As its weird, mournful cadences fell upon her ear it seemed to Miriam as if she were hearing a cry from the other world, a cry that had the voice of one she had listened to in childhood, and she thought with a sudden swelling of the heart how it might be possible that her

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long-vanished mother might be among that blessed host that was said to stand adoring before the holy Tabernacle. If it were so, well might she mingle with the sad voices of the organ, pleading—pleading so sweetly, so gently, so irresistibly. But then there came a chord full of dissonance, a jarring and a jangling, a wild burst of discordant noise as of one in anger. And it rolled through the great church, reverberating with the awful crash of the midsummer thunder. The time was hastened on into a rapid whirl of sound, as if some deity were hurling its maledictions upon a world of sin and crime. Then came a slower and more humble motive, the song of one who, having disregarded the voice of love, is at length frightened into an attitude of submission, with the falling of bitter tears, the tears of repentance. A joyous melody now grew into being, and swelled into the fulness of sweeter happiness. A note of triumph rang throughout the temple, a glorious

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march such as might welcome the throngs of the blessed as they coursed in gladsome processions through the bright avenues of Paradise. A burst of mingled melody and harmony, a song of rapture, a cry of more than earthly bliss, — then a stillness solemn as the grave. The music was finished.

For a moment Miriam continued to listen as if she yet expected to hear new developments of the wonderful symphony. But when her ears caught no sound in the gathering darkness, she knew the blessed hour was at an end. She came back to her real existence with a shock of disappointment, and would have burst into tears but for the touch of Florence's gentle hand upon her shoulder.

“Oh, Miriam, was it not lovely?”

“It was divine. But let us leave this place, dear. I already feel a sense of something awful around us. Where is Father Daring?”

“Why, it was he that was playing. Did you not see him upon the organ seat?”

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“I saw nothing, or rather, I saw more than it is given to most of mankind to see. Oh, Florence, there is something more than mortal about Father Daring. I never heard such music in my life. But come! Father Daring is beckoning to us.”

The aged priest, who had stolen noiselessly away from them, was the performer of the music which had created so deep an impression within her soul. He had approached the instrument with a prayer upon his lips, — a prayer that he then interpreted into melodies and harmonies most ravishing. He had addressed himself indeed to God, but at the same time he had endeavored so to frame his song that its meanings should strike full upon the heart of the human hearer. He had thrown his whole soul into the effort, so that now, as he descended into the lower church, a reaction consequent upon so great an expenditure of vital force began to be felt. He had scarcely reached

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a pew opposite to that of Miriam and her sister when he sank into it exhausted.

Miriam hurried to him, noting even in the gathering gloom that all was not well; but by the time she reached him he was again upon his feet and smiling as affably as ever.

“Oh, Father Daring, thank you! thank you! You have spoken in the last half-hour as you could never have spoken in words. But we have fatigued you. It is growing late and we are keeping you from your other duties.”

Father Daring reassured her, and gently fondling the fair hair of Florence, he led the way to the door of the church. He was about to push it open when there came to their ears the evening song of the little sodality girls chanting their Office in the chapel of the basement. The words ascended with startling clearness up into the greater church, and Miriam involuntarily paused to listen. She covered her face with her hands as

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the innocent voices pleaded to the Blessed Mother to save them, and when the hymn was ended the pagan maiden, drawing her sister with her, knelt at the shrine that stood near-by. Her prayer was only a prayer of tears, but when she arose and took the priest's hand, there was a light in her countenance that bespoke a new presence within her soul.

CHAPTER XV

IN the evening of that same day Geoffrey Daunt, after leaving Miriam, was called to a house on Barrington Avenue, where he was to transact a piece of business involving the transfer of a large mortgage from a private party to the manufacturing concern of which he acted at the time as agent. It was already nine o'clock when he arrived at his destination, and was shown into the presence of its owners. In the smoking-room he found two men seated at a table, which bore upon it many legal documents. These they were carefully examining and putting in order.

One of these men, swarthy and thick-set, was, as his manner and speech denoted, a devotee to the trade of horse-flesh. He was certainly above fifty years of age and had about him the air of one who in his

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time had mingled with all classes of society. There was something of vulgarity in the lavish display of ornament in the way of rings, diamonds, and loud-patterned clothing, though all this was toned down by the cool, almost suave decisiveness of his action and speech. He was Evaristus E. Brine, the uncle of the other and younger man. The latter, Manley Brine, a man of twenty-five, was the exact anti-type of his uncle. Tall and well-formed, he had improved his natural graces of physique by a thorough course of athletics while at college. Men would stop to admire his figure as he passed along the street, and it went without saying that many a fond mamma had cast eyes upon him with a view to her daughter's future position in life. Handsome and accomplished, Manley had, above all, preserved the high reputation for honor which had made his father one of the most popular men of the metropolis. A Catholic in every sense of the word, he carried into the

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order of his day every duty which his religion could impose upon him, and he was repaid for the open courageousness of his actions by a respect few men could dream of gaining. He had inherited his father's fortune, the income of which he was to share with his sister and with this uncle while the latter lived.

The diversity in tastes and dispositions between the two men raised up in time many serious disagreements. Manley, notwithstanding his evenness of temper, had yet a drop of Celtic blood running in his veins which would at times cause him to vent his anger upon actions which in his honesty he felt were mean or unmanly. He could not help perceiving in his uncle a superabundance of such exhibitions of contemptible spirit, and he was not slow to enter his protests in most vigorous terms. The end was that Evaristus came, in time, to conceive a most bitter and uncompromising hatred for his nephew, which was soon followed by the desire

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that usually accompanies such spirit, of bringing misfortune upon his enemy. This feeling, however, he kept closely concealed, in the hope that he might by a show of parental solicitude so work upon the young man's natural generosity, as to entrap him into a position where he would be obliged to cede to his uncle his share in the property of his father.

It was close upon nine o'clock that evening when Geoffrey Daunt was shown into the presence of these two men. They had expected him as the agent of his company, and after the usual formalities of introduction the three men set themselves down at the table prepared for the business in hand.

There was yet one party to the transaction not present. The holder of the mortgage, Mr. Leslie Rogers, had been expected for hours before. A messenger had been sent for him but a quarter of an hour previously and he might arrive at any moment.

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While they waited, the three men lighted cigars and discussed the news of most absorbing interest. Suddenly the uncle, who had been engrossed in some extraneous thought, startled his companions by bringing his fist down upon the table with unnecessary violence.

"Manley," he said with an oath, "you will drive me mad yet with your timid little precautions. Look here, Daunt; what do you think of a man who will not trust his own uncle?"

"Without security?" asked Geoffrey.

"Does he need security when it is a question of his uncle? Am I a thief? Have I ever defrauded any living soul? Answer me that, Manley Brine."

"I can't say that you have, uncle; but in a matter of business, when the stakes are so high, it would be foolish to trust to anyone's mere word."

"What is it about?" queried Daunt, now completely mystified.

"It is this," the nephew answered.

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"This Leslie Rogers brings back two mortgages to-night, one for fifty thousand, which you are here to negotiate, and another for twenty-five thousand. Now my uncle wishes me to renew the twenty-five thousand and lend him the money for a year without security. I have need of the money myself at present, even if I were willing to accommodate him upon such risky terms."

Geoffrey could answer this problem in his own way, but as it would involve him in unnecessary difficulty with the uncle he preferred to keep out of the matter altogether.

"That is a matter," he said, "which you had better settle between yourselves."

CHAPTER XVI

HE was rising from the table to light a cigar when the door of the room opened and a young lady of eighteen looked in. It was Manley's sister Agnes, a slight delicate girl, whose lovely disposition appeared even in her eyes.

"Mr. Rogers has arrived, uncle," she said.

"In the usual state, Agnes?"

"Oh, worse, it seems to me. He is so completely intoxicated to-night that he had to be carried to the cloak-room."

"They should have put him to bed. Will you be so kind, dear, as to ask the men to fetch him up to the spare room. He will be himself in a few minutes. Strange fellow, Daunt; no matter how badly he feels, five minutes of sleep put him on his feet again."

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Agnes retired and the three men sat down to wait until the convivial Rogers should be in condition to transact his little business. In a moment more they heard the scuffling of the servants carrying their burden upstairs. They heard the heavy sound as he was finally thrown upon the bed, the closing of the door, and the returning footsteps of the bearers.

It proved very tedious, this waiting for a fellow whose indisposition might last for a long time as well as for a few minutes. Daunt was for going up to arouse the sleeper, but the others objected so earnestly, pleading their thorough knowledge of the man's habits, that he consented to wait at most a quarter of an hour.

"You must know," he remonstrated, "that my time is valuable. I shall have to take the midnight train at all events, and I do not like the idea of having come here all for nothing."

When the quarter of an hour had passed and there was no sound that might indicate

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the coming of Rogers it was determined upon that Manley should ascend to the room in which he lay and obtain the mortgages. If he should find Rogers still in his stupor he should take the documents from his pocket if necessary.

"It would of course be a different matter," the uncle explained, "if this meeting were final. As nothing will be done this evening except to examine the securities, there can be no harm in obtaining the papers in that way."

Manley, for his own part, scarcely cared to trouble a person, even in the unconsciousness of drunkenness, and he would not have undertaken the action had he not known that Rogers would be perfectly satisfied himself when he should come again to sobriety.

He approached the room, therefore, on tiptoe, and entering, turned on the light. The figure of the drunkard was stretched across the bed from side to side. He was lying upon his back with both arms out-

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stretched and his face turned upwards, and at first sight he appeared to be sunk in a deep slumber.

Manley approached in order to stir him into consciousness if possible; but as he bent over the swollen face, he started back in alarm. The features had a livid appearance, more like that of the dead than of the living. Out of the mouth itself an object protruded which Manley, on taking it into his hand, perceived to be a small flask. It was only large enough to hold a gill, and upon its side he read the ominous word, "poison."

Instantly a sense of horror came over the young man. A thousand and one unpleasant thoughts flashed through his head in a second of time, so that in the shock and confusion he reeled unsteadily against the wall. The feeling was but momentary. He recovered himself, and hurrying at once below, beckoned to the other men to follow him.

He related his experience as they bent

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over the prostrate man examining his pulse and listening for a possible heart-beat. As far as their observations went there was no doubt that Rogers was dead.

But how came he to die ? The flask was examined and the natural conclusion was arrived at that the accident had happened from a dose of poison which the fellow in his intoxication had mistaken for whiskey. He must have brought the flask with him, as there was no knowledge on the part of the uncle or nephew of any such vessel in this house. When it was suggested, merely for the sake of sifting all possible theories, that the stuff might have been administered by one of the servants for the purpose of robbery, the idea was proved to be untenable, as the unfortunate man's watch and quite a sum of ready money were yet found in his pocket.

In this search they drew forth a single document, which proved to be the fifty-thousand-dollar mortgage. It was the only paper of the kind upon his person, — a fact

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that naturally elicited the inquiry as to where the other mortgage might be. In the excitement of the moment a wild theory was formed simultaneously in the minds of Evaristus and of Daunt. Was it possible that Manley Brine could have had a hand in a work like this? The mortgage was worth twenty-five thousand dollars to him. They both looked at once into the countenance of the young man, who, however, bore their scrutiny without flinching.

“It will be necessary to send for a physician,” Daunt proposed. “The decision as to whether or not the man came to his end accidentally or by design can then be determined. If it be shown that there was a real poison in the flask, the case of course will have to be investigated further.”

The physician appeared very promptly upon the scene. It required but little examination on his part to enable him to pronounce the poor fellow actually dead. When, however, a close search was made, both in the drops of liquid which yet re-

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mained in the flask, and especially in the contents of the man's stomach, the doctor was surprised to find not the slightest trace of any really poisonous substance.

"He died of whiskey pure and simple," he said at length with an authoritative wave of the hand.

A sigh of relief escaped from the three watchers, especially from Manley Brine, to whose mind the accident had begun to present unpleasant possibilities. He grasped the physician's hand and pressed it warmly as he said, "Doctor, we can never sufficiently thank you for such a report. I must confess that the affair was beginning to look rather difficult until you said that."

"Oh, I have no doubt," he answered, "that the police would make quite a fuss over it had they come at first upon the scene. They would arrive at my decision in the end, nevertheless."

CHAPTER XVII

GEOFFREY DAUNT now paid his farewell respects and left, hoping to find the late train for Albany.

He saw at once that the matter of the mortgage was out of the question at such a time, and wisely postponed it until the affairs of the apparently deceased Rogers should be put into order once more.

During the evening the undertaker came and removed the body to the home of Rogers in the town of Morton, a few miles away.

It was now past the hour of midnight. The physician, who had returned in order to fill out his report more thoroughly, had called together the members of the household, examining them closely as to the condition of Rogers from the time he was brought into the house until he was left in his stupor on the bed. When he had fin-

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ished, the servants were dismissed and none remained but the uncle, the nephew, Miss Agnes, and the physician.

“Mr. Brine,” the latter said, addressing the uncle, “my report will say that the unfortunate man died from excess in alcoholism. I believe it would be best to make no mention of the flask. What do you think of it, Manley?”

The young man was sitting with his face buried in his hands, apparently unconscious of the words addressed to him. He looked up now, however, like one recovering from sleep, and answered decidedly:—

“I think, Doctor, that such a proceeding would be wrong.”

Evaristus and the physician were taken aback at this sudden turn of affairs. They were at first inclined to believe that Manley had not yet comprehended the gravity of the circumstances.

“Do you mean to say, Manley, that you wish the affair to be made public? Heavens, man! if you have no regard for

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your own reputation and for your neck, think at least, of others. Would you bring the stain of murder upon the name of your sister ? ”

“ There is no murder,” protested Manley.

“ We do not say there is,” the uncle declared. “ But the stain can soil a reputation the most innocent in the world if circumstantial evidence be plenty. Manley, this straining for honesty of purpose is not only foolish but criminal, in view of the unnecessary ruin it must entail.”

“ That is so,” the physician added. “ We do not conceal anything that ought to be known. We merely wish to present the cause of the death in a manner that cannot be mistaken. To mention the flask would be to put a false appearance upon the case.”

“ It is your duty, Doctor,” Manley protested, “ to present the facts as you found them. To do otherwise would be to utter a falsehood, and I shall never consent to accept my good name or my life upon a lie.”

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The physician, stung to the quick by these words, would have resented them forcibly but for a sign from Evaristus.

"Doctor," the latter said, coming between the two men, "you will have to pardon Manley. I really believe this tragedy has unbalanced him for the moment. Let me ask him a question. Manley, have you any right to interfere with the business of a physician?"

"Certainly not, uncle, unless I know him to do a positive crime; then I may and must protest."

"But do you feel bound to incriminate yourself in order to set another right in his actions? Are you bound to endanger your own life when no good can follow from it?"

"I only know this; that I shall take no part in this wrong-doing — this concealment of a truth that ought to be known."

"Ah," exclaimed the physician, "we do not ask you to take part. We will see to

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it that no question is raised. Of course it will be another matter should this affair be investigated further. Then I also shall stand forward to declare all that has happened."

The young man remained for some moments buried in reflection. He saw very clearly that to bring this matter before the legal authorities would only involve himself and his sister in the most annoying difficulties and place their name unnecessarily in connection with that terrible word murder. Yet on the other hand was there not an obligation of stating in an official report the exact circumstances of the accident, no matter how it might turn out for himself or others? There seemed to be but one conclusion to all his reasoning, and acting upon it he gave his decision.

"Uncle," he said, "I cannot remain another day under this roof while so unholy a scheme is being concocted. As for myself, I shall immediately send my version of the affair to the chief of police. I shall then take the first train to our country house at

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Wayland Hills, where both you and the civil authorities will know where to find me if need be."

"I will go with you, Manley," Agnes declared, throwing her arms about her brother's neck. "I knew you would not yield to dishonor, and I am sure you shall not suffer for it."

Evaristus and the physician appeared to have fallen into the most depressing hopelessness. Finally the latter, throwing up both his hands with a gesture of indifference, sat down and changed his report to suit the demands of Manley.

"Do not blame me, young man," he said, "if a public trial and a life imprisonment be the result of this. There is evidence enough to convict you."

"I would rather die with the truth on my lips than live a life-long lie."

The others laughed scornfully, except Agnes, who clung all the more trustingly to her brother.

When the paper was finally made out

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and signed by those present, Manley turned to his sister.

“Come, Agnes,” he said. “We can start on the early morning train. Uncle may send our effects after us. But until this matter has settled itself down into perfect security, we were better far away from the scene that called it forth.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE summer cottage of the Brines was situated on Elmwood Avenue in one of the most picturesque portions of the Wayland Hills. It was a comfortable little yellow structure surrounded by a wide veranda and almost completely hidden in a mass of Virginia creepers. It looked out, moreover, upon a forty-acre stretch of meadow-land surrounded by thick forests of birch, elm, oak, and chestnut trees, around which the low crest of hills ranged themselves as protecting forces against the fury of the winds.

Manley, whose name had already acquired a celebrity in the field of letters, found a ready welcome in the office of the Freeland Review, in which his luminous articles upon the current issues of the day appeared every fortnight, even before he had thought of settling in this mountainous home. In

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the office he was invaluable for his power of controlling the working forces of the periodical; his ready wit and magnetic suggestiveness having saved the firm many a trial when the help were upon the verge of precipitating a strike. In this way he had come to be regarded as the virtual superintendent of the concern, having made it a practice to visit the office every day to look over the running of the plant.

At home in the Hills, whither he returned now every evening upon the five o'clock train, he found a quiet the most profound, but at the same time a peace such as he could not know in the rush of city life. There were no neighbors, save a few humble farmers' families, within over a mile on any side. An academy, however, stood very near upon the crest of the hill to the north. It was conducted by a band of black-gowned sisters, whose pupils had returned by this time to their homes for the summer vacation.

Manley and Agnes were thus thrown

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upon their own resources for such little recreations as the evenings and the woodland solitude allowed. The little chapel of the Academy saw them kneeling regularly at the seven-o'clock Angelus, before the Blessed Sacrament, and every night the lights of their cottage were extinguished just as the distant village-bell was striking the hour of ten.

One evening — it was within a week after the dread tragedy — Manley returned to the Hills in very low spirits. Agnes endeavored to coax from him the reason, but for some time received no other answer than that affairs were going badly at the office.

When tea was over the young woman seated herself at the piano. Her fingers ran lightly over a variety of pieces the music of which she deemed capable of soothing the dejection of spirits which was weighing her brother's heart down. As she played she could see him across the room weeping silently, as if forgetful that he came within her vision. When the

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music was finished he arose and placing the book he had been pretending to read upon the table, he said : —

“ Agnes, I feel that you ought to know what has happened, and I am going to tell you. Be brave, therefore, for it will not please you. It was this way. During this afternoon we had a visit from Geoffrey Daunt, who, you will remember, visited our city house last Monday evening. He is a fellow of quite easy manners and in the presence of his inferiors is apt to give free rein to his offensive familiarity. In his progress through the room, where I was designing a cover for the coming Review, I overheard him address some insulting remarks to the young women who work in the office. The girls — good young women, every one of them, as I know well — blushed under the shame of his insinuations, and, as they seemed to look to me for protection, I immediately arose and ordered the fellow out of the place. At first he laughed in my face, as if he regarded the matter as a huge

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joke, but when he found that I meant what I said he grew angry and raised his arm to strike me. As he did so he caught a glimpse of my features, paused a moment, and then with an oath turned away. A crowd of compositors, printers, binders, and working people of every description had gathered around us in the meantime, and when Daunt perceived this, he stopped in his progress toward the door, and turning to me pointed his finger as he cried out loudly and clearly : —

“‘You are the last person to put on a virtuous appearance, Manley Brine, — you who have blood of another upon your hands.’

“‘What do you mean?’ I shouted — springing forward to strike the wretch. In this I was prevented by the crowd which had intervened between us. The fellow raised his voice all the louder and answered : —

“‘I mean that you, Manley Brine, murdered Leslie Rogers last Monday night. You are now a fugitive from justice.’

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“ ‘It is a lie !’ I shouted, now frenzied with anger.

“ Fortunately I held the good-will of the hands, who now re-echoed my words. Daunt thereupon perceived that he had fallen into hostile company and hurriedly made his escape. For a short time the men pressed me on all sides to explain what it meant, and when I related how he had insulted the young women and had been ordered away on that account by me, they readily accepted his last spectacular charge as the mere effect of blind anger, and thought no more about it. I came away almost immediately, full of apprehension of the trouble that unfortunate accident may yet cause us.”

CHAPTER XIX

THIS story of Manley fell most heavily upon the heart of Agnes. She tried to keep back her tears, but they would come. Manley was there-upon more sorrowful than ever, seeing that he had caused her so much pain. Then, when the first fit of weeping had passed and Manley began to pretend to an unusual amount of indifference, his apparent good-feeling communicated itself to his sister, so that in a few moments they were both laughing heartily over a funny story he remembered out of "David Harum." They were both, however, well aware that their gaiety was only assumed for the occasion; in their hearts the wound was burning more painfully as the moments went by.

To make the matter worse, they received a visit that evening from the manager of the Review, Mr. Max Eddiman, a man

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from whose venerable years of experience Manléy had learned much in the business of conducting a periodical. Mr. Eddiman was accompanied by Geoffrey Daunt, who entered the modest parlor with the swaggering air of a victor.

“Manley,” the old man said when they were seated, “I come to inquire about the strange affair of this afternoon. I understand that Mr. Daunt here has made a serious charge against you, a charge, indeed, that would reflect not only on yourself, but even upon the welfare of the Review which you are conducting. You understand that it would not be well for us to have it said that one to whom such a — an — imputation has been attributed is at the head of a magazine whose principal object is the teaching of civic morality and complete obedience to law. It is, therefore, my painful duty to interfere somewhat in your private business, — not that I have the slightest suspicion of your integrity, but merely for the sake of clear-

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ing the air, you know. And so I would like to ask you categorically, is this charge true?"

For a moment Manley remained mute, as if the answer might demand thought, not in regard to the truth or falsity of the charge, but rather as to what words would best convey his explanation. Then there came into his mind the reflection that, after all, he had no answer to make. It was a question to be answered at another time and in another place. It was therefore with a slight suspicion of asperity in his voice that he said:—

"Mr. Eddiman, I do not wish to appear rude to one whom I have learned to esteem and revere, but even to you I must refuse to answer that question."

"Very well, my boy. I respect your privacy and I shall always think that some deep motive of honor lies behind your refusal. Nevertheless, it is my duty, in view of what public opinion may demand, to request the discontinuance of your

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attendance at the office until such time as this matter has been made clear."

"I understand you, sir," Manley replied with a proud assumption of indifference. "When I return to the office again, I shall be better able to give the answer which cannot be given properly now. I have this to say, however, that my hands are innocent of any such crime, and only the lips of a coward and liar could bring it against me."

The words were spoken with a flashing of the eyes that uttered things a thousand times more bitter. Naturally they brought the other man to his feet with an oath. He would have clenched with Manley but for the presence of the elder gentleman, who stood between the enemies with hands outstretched.

"Oh, you boys!" he cried with a laugh. "You both need to attend school again if only to learn how to respect the presence of the aged. For shame! Let this matter end here, for the present at least. The

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future will declare which of you has honor on his side."

As he spoke he grasped the wrist of Daunt and partly dragged him to the door. "Good-night, Manley," he cried as he vanished. "Try to arrange matters so as to be down at the office as soon as possible. You know we need you. Good-night, boy, good-night."

CHAPTER XX

WHEN he was gone Manley, in the excess of his discouragement, cast himself upon the sofa, where he lay as if unconscious. Agnes came into the room to discover the cause of the noise he had made in falling. She went over to him.

“Manley, Manley,” she cried, “look up!”

He rose to his feet and casting upon her a gaze full of unspeakable anguish staggered like a drunken man out of the room. She followed him to his own chamber and saw him lie down upon the bed. She took a chair and sat near him putting her hand upon his hot forehead. The touch of the one he loved had always a soothing effect upon the nerves of Manley, and Agnes was glad to note that it did not fail on this unhappy night. In a few minutes his senses,

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already stupefied by the unusual demand made upon them, began to lapse into sleep.

The thought occurred to her of running quickly to Father Endly, the chaplain of the Academy, and of bringing him down to speak with her brother when he should awaken; but she remembered that it was Saturday night, when the priest would be busy in the confessional. Where should she seek help in the midst of her sorrow?

Then, sudden as the flash of lightning, there came across her mind the words that were spoken of old: "Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy burdened and I will refresh you." Why did she not think of it before! To the Tabernacle! to the Holy One there waiting for just such sorrows as these!

She threw her shawl across her shoulders and fled up the road, repeating in her heart, as she went along, a prayer that the good God would keep watch over her Manley until she should return.

In the church she found no one at the con-

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fessional ; the priest was therefore through with his duties for the night. But it was not the priest she wanted now. She rushed to the altar casting herself precipitately upon her knees and pouring forth such an agony of petition as she had never before known. She felt all through her prayer that her dear Lord was listening in the quiet of His holy temple, and would bring her the aid and grace she desired.

When she finished she arose and saw the priest standing before his empty confessional reading his breviary. She went over and begged him to come with her to her poor brother Manley.

The priest listened to her request with an air of the kindest concern and for answer said merely, "Wait here, my child."

He left her and went into his residence. When he returned in a few minutes dressed for the street he beckoned to her and led the way to her own house.

On the way she had time to enlighten

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him as to the principal incidents that had befallen during the week, so that before they had arrived at their destination the priest had fully understood how affairs stood.

As they entered the room of Manley they found that he was just awakening. He sat upon the edge of the bed, the picture of the most pitiful discouragement. So completely wrapt up was he in the perplexities of his position that he failed for a moment to notice the presence of the priest. When at length he perceived the man of God standing beside him, his countenance full of pity and affection, Manley, great, strong man that he was, burst into a flood of tears and sobbed like a child.

For a time the priest said nothing, but having contrived to gain possession of the young man's hand, he held it, pressing it warmly. It was Manley who spoke first.

"Father," he said, "it has come to the end. It is useless for me to struggle any longer against this horrible fate. I can

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see no way out of it but by ending once for all this unhappy life of mine. God has abandoned me; what use is there in living longer!"

"Manley," the priest replied, "would you wish to go to your grave with this stain upon your name?"

"No, Father! But the stain will live with me through life."

"Think of yourself, young man. With your conscience and your God you stand innocent; what need you fear, then, from the tongues of men. Moreover, your story is at present only built upon rumor. Would you make a confession of guilt by suicide? It would implicate your dear sister, upon whose name a share of this imputation has already been cast. I will not speak of the religious and moral aspects of such an act, as you are in no condition to listen to the voice of God. Come, come, Manley. You are a coward in spite of yourself. Remember who you are. Show that your heart is made of something masculine."

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The young man yielded to the persuasion of the priest, whose hand he pressed as he said in a voice choked with emotion: "God bless you, Father! I know you are right. You have made me heartily ashamed of myself. But what could one expect from me under the circumstances?"

"I could expect you to manifest your confidence in God, by leaving the issue to His holy Will, instead of taking it upon yourself to defend your good name. Why, Manley, my boy! Do you imagine that you alone can successfully combat the hostility of public opinion? Fall down upon your knees, man, and before you go any further in this matter let us beg aid and light from Him alone in whose Hands lie all human safety and comfort."

And so they knelt at the bedside, the priest, the brother, and the sister, and they prayed to God in His mercy, to His Blessed Mother, and to their guardian angels. When they arose, there was no word spoken. The priest threw his cloak over

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his shoulder and opening the door silently went away.

All hearts, however, understood that a victory had been won, for which a triple prayer of thanksgiving went up that night before the throne of God.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Miriam left the church her thoughts were entirely engrossed with the awful beauty of that religion of which that temple stood as a fitting monument. On arriving at home she found Madam Rogers awaiting her in the little reception-room. The good woman had begun to feel somewhat alarmed at the protracted absence of her niece, and it was therefore with a sigh of relief that she ran to meet her. She could not but notice the air of preoccupation upon the countenance of Miriam and the tears which yet moistened the eyes of her sister.

Miriam sprang into the arms of her aunt and began to sob as if her heart were breaking, while Florence, infected with the contagion of tears, buried her face in her hands and refused to be consoled. It was

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at once an occasion of trouble and of joy to Madam, who could not but divine the cause of so much emotion, so that, without uttering any word of questioning, she pressed the afflicted orphans to her heart.

When the first excitement of this affecting meeting had subsided, Miriam, casting herself upon her knees exclaimed in an agony of feeling: —

“Oh, Aunt Mary! why did we not meet Father Daring before? To-day he has brought us into Paradise. Such thoughts, such sweet inspirations have flooded my mind! It seems as if the light I sought were already breaking. Auntie, pray for me, pray for me!”

Madam pressed the feverish cheeks of the girl between her hands, and bending, kissed her cold lips.

“Miriam, dear, you have only entered into the vestibule of God’s temple. Pray that He may yet open it up to you in all its glory. Remember that the peace of the Lord comes after that Faith which sancti-

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fies good works. For that you must pray unceasingly."

"Will you teach us to pray, aunt, dear?"

"With all my heart! Come, let us kneel now, while the grace of God is still knocking at the doors of your souls. You also, darling Florence; come here beside me and unite your thoughts with mine while we lift up our souls to God for guidance."

They knelt together, the aunt clasping a sister with each of her arms. It was the simplest of prayers they said, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Apostles' Creed. But over the words she lingered so long and so lovingly that each moment brought newer and fresher visions of light and peace to their souls.

They continued praying until the darkness had cast its shroud over all things. It was so sweet to feel a communion with a world in which the Infinite Glory flashed its brilliant rays over immensities beyond the imagination, that Miriam, whose intellect-

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ual vision had been hitherto circumscribed by the shallow boundaries of the visible, would have remained in the contemplation of things supernatural for hours longer had not the jarring sound of the dinner gong awakened her to the reality of mundane things.

After dinner she hurried to her former sanctuary in the drawing-room, where the busts of her atheistic deities still looked forth with chilling stare from their niches in the walls. She would have dashed them to the ground in a passion of anger, but for her aunt, who represented to her that it would be well to wait until her ardor had somewhat cooled, before doing what she even now felt to be an act of obligation.

“To-morrow, Miriam, if you will. I would have you perform this act of renunciation in a more equable state of mind. You would only say, later, that you had acted without reasoning. To-morrow you will be calm; you will then know the full meaning of what you are contemplating.”

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"But, Aunt Mary, I feel it now. It makes the blood chill in my veins to think I have ever followed the leadership of these soulless monsters."

"Nevertheless, you should proceed intelligently. We will be content to-night to cast a covering over their cold heads. Florence, we will permit you to extinguish the lamps, which I hope will never again burn in so unholy a cause. The destruction of the busts will demand a more solemn ceremony, at which we will invite Father Daring to preside."

The two sisters were charmed at the orderly method laid out by Madam, and disputed no more upon the matter. Florence performed her part with a thoroughness than which none could be more perfect, and when the lamps were darkened she said with a little enthusiasm:—

"How nice it would be to offer these pretty silver lamps to the service of the sanctuary! It would be a sort of atonement for their evil use in the past."

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“We can refer the question to the priest ; he will know whether it would be proper or not. And now, girls, you are both tired and worn out with all the excitement of this day. Recommend yourselves to God before retiring, and make a firm resolution of embracing the earliest possible opportunity of reconciling yourselves to His holy law from which you have been so long estranged.”

CHAPTER XXII

MIRIAM awoke early, after a night full of fitful snatches of sleep disturbed by fretful dreams. She arose before the rest of the household, and after a hasty breakfast called for the carriage and drove down to the Rectory. Father Daring was returning from the church after saying Mass, and led her into the parlor. She begged him to leave her awhile until he should have eaten something, and to please her he acceded to her request.

In his absence she took occasion to glance at the objects of interest that lay about. Her eyes dwelt particularly upon a rather unique engraving that hung in the corner. It was a fantastic idea of the Way of Calvary. It represented Our Saviour bearing the burden of the Cross upon His shoulders. Around Him, preceding, ac-

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companying, and following Him, was the strangest mob that one could imagine. It was composed of men and women in modern costume, the men in dress suits, the women attired as if for a society ball. The meaning, at first rather obscure, gradually dawned upon the observer and produced an impression deeper than the sublimest words.

What impressed Miriam most was that the features of these roués and bad women, who trailed in silks and broadcloths after their Saviour, hurling stones upon His fainting Body, were the exact reproduction of features she had often beheld in her own drawing-room at her Thursday evening receptions. There were the same dogged, cynical leers, the same fawning servility, the impress of a lying hypocrisy which men of the world flaunt in each other's faces with the distinct understanding that no one is to be deceived thereby. There was the cruelty of the man of wealth who crushes under his heel men and women the

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latchets of whose shoes he is unworthy to loose. Rabid beasts all of them ; with stone in hand and imprecations upon the lips, they follow the Divine One not for his consolation, but that they may exult in His apparent helplessness.

Oh, is there a thing so pitiable, so wretched in God's world as these irreligious hypocrites whose dishonesty has served them in the place of intellect, and given them the means of self-glorification? How they swell out the paunch, thanking fortune that they are not like the rest of men! Prating of honor in public, their hidden lives are but a long record of deeds fit only for beasts. Crying out for education, their flimsy brains have grasped only the narrow little circle of ideas which would serve any fool for the gaining of money.

Such was the world of hungry-eyed demons that Miriam looked upon in this curious picture, and a blush of shame began to mantle her cheeks as she thought that her own portrait might deservedly be among

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them. She was beginning now to look deeper into the causes of her former theories than she had ever before. She had imagined that her own innate nobility of soul and natural sinlessness must reside as well in all that mob which, Thursday after Thursday, surged around her, whispering flattery and insinuations which she had never before understood.

She had often been asked, and had herself often asked the question, why she had never taken a fancy to young men. To-day as she looked upon this picture the reason seemed to flash across her mind. Was it not true that among all her social acquaintances she had never yet encountered a real man, — that is, one who had within his body a real, living soul? She had met gilded creatures, pretty things that walked and talked, that were even muscular at times, oarsmen of college crews, or athletes in various ways; but their whole excellence seemed to have dissolved into fat, blood, and bone; their whole content was in

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themselves, like the brutes that wallow in happiness in the enclosures behind country barns. These scrubbed and polished animals, solemnly declaring for the non-existence of a soul, had really never attained to the dignity of possessing one worthy of recognition.

Miriam had never before analyzed her reasons for disliking her social set. She had put it down as one of the happenings of existence, and so she had never worried about it. Now she saw with clearness the nature of those who had made bids for her friendship, and she recoiled in horror at the thought that she was often so near to making herself the slave of one of them.

CHAPTER XXIII

SHE turned away from the picture as Father Daring entered the room. He had caught the direction of her glance, however, and a smile came over his features as he remarked : —

“I see that you have been studying that engraving. It is remarkable, is it not ?”

“Father, it is a picture of modern society. It must have been inspired, it is so perfect. I too have been one of that mad horde; I must have cast stones at the gentle Saviour.”

She hid her eyes in her handkerchief. When she recovered from the sadness caused by the reflection, she turned to the priest and laid before him the object of her visit.

“Father,” she said, “I wish to return to the Faith, if you think me worthy. I know I ought not to hope for so much

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happiness; but then I have heard it said that no one is so wicked but that God will gladly grant him forgiveness if he only really desires it."

"I am afraid, my dear girl, that you are acting too much under the influence of a sudden caprice. Pardon me for saying it. I always require that such as desire to enter the Church should first give evidence that their determination is founded upon solid motives. I know how you feel about it. Your poor heart is rent with anxiety, and you are willing to follow the Lord, as Peter was, to prison and chains. Take care, however, that like Peter you do not jump with such precipitation as to cause a greater and more deplorable fall."

Miriam appeared somewhat disconcerted at this view of her case. It was so like what Madam had said on the night preceding; but she felt its truth now more than ever.

"Father," she said, "it may be as you

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say, and you with all your long experience are, no doubt, more able to read hearts than are the possessors of those hearts themselves. Nevertheless, there is within me a strong conviction that, unless I can soon make my peace fully and finally with God, my heart will break under the heavy strain. Tell me what to do and I promise that I will carry out your instructions faithfully.

The priest was charmed at the girl's exhibition of zeal, and felt in his heart that the grace of God had really made an impression upon her.

"Listen," he said. "From what I have learned of you, the life you have led has been spent in the midst of influences which do not readily lose their power. You have read extensively from authors who have devoted their lives and their genius to the formation of theories fascinating to the sense, though untenable after serious study. They have told you that we are prejudiced; after you have given a little time to the

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examination of their methods you will be forced to confess that there is no more prejudiced and narrow mortal on the face of the earth than a modern agnostic. We have been regarded as intolerant; this charge they have brought against us even while they were in the act of framing a law of persecution against us. We have been called ignorant because we teach doctrines which they have not intellect sufficient to appreciate. Now, my dear girl, it will require time and application before you can entirely efface from your mind the big-mouthed boastings to which your ears have become accustomed in the midst of your former surroundings. Do you think me harsh for speaking so?"

"You utter my own thoughts. I only wish I had awakened from my dreams long ago. I might then have laid a foundation upon which now to stand. However, it is not yet too late."

"And you will be rewarded for your patience. Now, what I would propose

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for you to do is this. You will consent will you not, to leave your home for a week in order to place yourself under instruction in the quiet of a convent?"

Miriam looked up with alarm, and Father Daring, observing that she had not understood his meaning, hastened to explain himself.

"I do not intend, of course, that you should imprison yourself. The convent I speak of is an academy in the Wayland Hills. It is a place where nearly a hundred young ladies spend their girlhood, studying for the various needs of woman life. During the vacation time most of the pupils have returned to their own homes, leaving the place more quiet and better adapted for private study and meditation. The Sisters who conduct the institution will be charmed to give you all the help you will need. You will find them delightful companions; not only full of the spirit of piety, but also accomplished in those arts of music, painting, and literature in which

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you yourself are so well versed. You will not be the first to have made a 'retreat' among those cool and shady cloisters. Only a few days ago the wife of one of our most prominent men of letters finished a week of retirement there, and has gone out into the world again better qualified than ever for the duties of her life. Have you ever spent any time at Wayland Hills?"

"I drove out there a short time ago with my aunt. I cannot recollect, however, to have seen this Academy."

"That is because it is situated far inland from the high-road. It is certainly the most charming position in the State. You will have an extent of some two hundred acres of hill and valley, forest and meadow in which to roam."

Miriam seemed but little responsive to the enthusiasm of Father Daring's words. She sat with her hands folded, an anxious expression in her eyes.

"You do not appear to be impressed by the prospect," the priest ventured.

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"It is not that," she replied. "I am thinking that my presence in that holy place would only be a sacrilege, a desecration."

"Will you accept my assurance that it will, on the contrary, serve as a blessing? Do you not know that these good Sisters are happiest when they can take some sorrowful child by the hand and lead her safely out of danger into the shelter of God's house?"

"Then they will not look on me as a monster?"

"They will love you more deeply than you have ever known. Will you believe me?"

"Father, I put myself into your hands. Lead where you will; I shall follow."

"That is sensible. If it is pleasant tomorrow we shall drive out for a preliminary visit. When you have seen the Academy I shall not fear that you will not like it."

They parted, Miriam somewhat discon-

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certed that her conversion should not have been ratified at once, and Father Daring with a prayer upon his lips that the grace of God might not prove ineffectual in the gentle soul of his convert.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN she had entered her house again she found Madam Rogers in a state of nervous anxiety. She had received a message stating that her brother had been taken suddenly ill, and that her presence would be of use. As she had not heard from her brother for some time she knew not whether the message might mean something grave, or merely that he had again succumbed to one of his usual attacks of alcoholism. Nevertheless, she felt it her duty to respond to the call in order that she might render whatever service would be profitable. She hated to part with her nieces just at the moment when she seemed of most use to them; but when she heard of the arrangement that Miriam had made with Father Daring in regard to the retreat, she perceived at once that her absence would not in the least

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prejudice the workings of the grace of God in their souls. With this consoling assurance she took the earliest train available, and was soon on the way to Morton.

The next morning, a day full of sunlight and coolness, Miriam drove to the Rectory with Florence. Father Daring was awaiting them in the little parlor. He was sincerely sorry that Madam had been visited with disquieting news, but as he remarked, it came at a time when her place should be taken by other guardians, scarcely less loving while still more able to help her nieces in their present perplexing difficulties.

He entered the carriage with them when all was in readiness and they drove off for their new destination. It was a delightful excursion on the whole. The road led through the Park for a mile or two, after which they emerged upon the Boulevard, a magnificent driveway that led for fully five miles into the heart of the country. Then came the river road with its pro-

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fusion of shady willows and elms overlooking the placid, dark waters of the stream.

Little was said for some time except upon topics of general interest until they had crossed the Wayland Bridge and entered into the midst of the Hills. Here Florence began to shed tears, much to the discomfiture of her braver sister.

"Why, Florence, dear," Miriam cried with an air of amusement, "one would imagine we were going to prison instead of to the house of our good Lord. It will be only for a week, and then we shall be back again in the wicked old world."

The Academy grounds lay far in from the road, upon Elmwood Avenue, and were reached after a few minutes' further driving. They entered into what seemed a deep woodland, under avenues of elms and pines, and they knew that the end of their progress was at hand when they came upon an ivy-crowned statue of the Sacred Heart set upon the summit of a little hill.

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The Academy burst upon them suddenly from the midst of a dense growth of trees ; it was a quaint collection of buildings, the entrance to which was formed from an ancient mansion, the former property of a venerable lady who even now watched over its destinies with an eye of pride and solicitude.

They drove under the porch before the entrance, where the Mother Superior, already apprised of their coming, was waiting to receive them. She was a pleasant-faced woman, with a smile of welcome that brought back to those lonely hearts all the courage and hopefulness that they could desire. She kissed the two girls tenderly and with a light laugh at the tall silk hat which Father Daring had consented to wear for this once in his life, she led the party into the house.

“ You are just in time,” she said, “ to see the children at their prayers. The Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is going on in the chapel, and I am sure you

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would all like to come in with us and say a prayer."

They followed the genial Sister into the chapel, which had a door opening into the reception-room, and all knelt in reverence before the Sacramental Presence. A bell that had sounded some minutes before, brought the children trooping into the church by another door. A hundred meek-looking girls they were, each clad in her black gown, her head covered by a veil of white gauze that hung far down over her shoulders and back. They passed in single file before the Blessed Sacrament, and after a profound adoration went slowly to their places in the pews.

Miriam looked upon the scene with the interest of one to whom it had once been familiar, but who had forgotten its innocent sweetness amid the wild hurry of the world; for she too had once followed as meekly as these in a procession of convent girls in the old days before the fall.

One of the Sisters now proceeded to the

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organ and began the prelude to a hymn in honor of the occasion. How clearly the voices of the children caught up the Latin words of the "Ecce Panis Angelorum!" until it seemed as if they themselves were but so many angelic spirits carrying unto earth a portion of their eternal song.

The lights that glimmered in clusters upon the altar, the profusion of roses, pinks, and smilax surrounding the golden monstrance prepared the senses of the visitors for that most tender of mysteries which stood forth like another "Ecce Homo!" pleading for the pity and compassion of mankind.

Miriam had forgotten how to pray. She could only sob out from her innermost heart one little petition repeated many times in the midst of her tears. "Oh, dear Lord!" she prayed, "bring me back to thee again. I am so unhappy wandering away that my life will never again know peace until I rest in thee." She almost felt that she had obtained her wish, so deep, so sweet a

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peace seemed to have entered her soul ; and when the time of the prayer was at an end it was necessary to arouse her from her revery by a touch upon the arm.

The party thence went out into the principal building admiring the spotless cleanliness of everything, the floors carpetless, but so highly polished and waxed that one feared to scratch their perfect smoothness by the tread of a heel. In the dormitories the rows of white beds looked like so many nests wherein these innocent ones might dream at night of Paradise and the angels of God.

Thus the morning sped quickly, and they were surprised when the noonday Angelus warned them that it was time to return.

It was arranged that Miriam should begin her retreat on the following Friday, so as to conclude it appropriately on the Feast of the Sacred Heart which should occur a week after. As for Florence, although she might not remain in the convent, owing to its crowded condition, a

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place was found for her with a neighboring family, people of her own class, among whom she could study her catechism with profit. Florence was overjoyed at this part of the arrangements, and in parting for the day was most effusive in her affectionate regard for the Mother Superior who had made it possible.

They drove home slowly, in a state of mind far different from that which accompanied them on their outward journey. Father Darling left them at his own door, promising to call on Thursday evening for the ceremony of blessing their house and cleansing it as far as possible from the malign influences that had up to this cast their blight upon its walls.

CHAPTER XXV

MIRIAM spent the afternoon writing letters of regret to her numerous acquaintances, informing them that for the future she should be obliged to abandon her Thursday evening soirées. Her reason for this she stated boldly, without concealing anything that might be misconstrued. "I am becoming a Catholic," she declared, "and as such it will be obviously out of the question to keep up a social function that had for its object the destruction of that religion which I have learned to know and love."

Geoffrey came to the house long before he could have received his note of dismissal. He had heard the news in other quarters, but he could not rest until he should hear the truth from her own lips.

"Good God!" he cried as he flung himself into her reception-room that evening.

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"Tell me it is not true, Miriam! You are not becoming a Catholic?"

Miriam pitied him for the agony that appeared in his face, but answered firmly in the affirmative. He argued with her, he pleaded, he almost threatened, but to no avail.

"Geoffrey," she said at length, "you know that I have seen the best there is in your agnostic creed. It has not satisfied me. I have now found what alone can give satisfaction, and I trust that God will not permit me to lose it again."

"But, Miriam, if this is really so it will be necessary for us to part company forever, and that, you know, will kill me. I have never told you before, Miss Elaine, but I must say it now, that I have had the deepest possible love for you, and if this is true, then I must renounce my love, and that I cannot do and live."

"You are forgetting yourself, Geoffrey Daunt. You have no right to use such language before me under any circum-

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stances. No action or word of mine has ever encouraged such a state of mind."

"I am very sorry to have shocked you," he said, now quite humbly, "but consider the cause of it. The agony in which I am living has driven all caution from my mind. But then, it matters little if, after all, you are about to give yourself to this superstition."

"I am about to give up the grossest of superstitions, and you, Geoffrey Daunt, know it as well as I. There was a time when I could listen to such dishonesties, when I knew not their meaning; but that time is past. I wish now to leave a creed whose ceremonial is a striving for effect, whose God is money, and whose prayer is the oppression of the poor and cruelty to the weak. You may succeed in dazzling the eyes of the unfortunate with your empty glorifications; but I shall henceforth, with God's help, be proof against them all."

Geoffrey Daunt cowered into his chair under the scathing glances of the woman for whose regard he would once have

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wished to die. Now his love began to change before the awful power of that mystery with which she appeared to be enveloped as with a cloud snatched from the storm. He was conquered, and he could not conceal the fact. He had loved her; but in the light of her Catholicity his love had taken on the darkness of fear. He arose as she finished her angry speech, stood a moment irresolute and then stretching out his hand, he said in a voice full of anguish:—

“Miss Elaine, let us, then, say farewell! I feel that my presence has become distasteful to you, and so I shall take my leave. Let us hope that this sudden resolution of yours may yet yield to sane reflection. Good-night.”

He shook her hand more warmly than propriety might have permitted, and then with a sob of anger, dashed blindly out of the house.

Miriam thought very little of the incident. She had never encouraged him in his display of affection, and consequently her refusal to consider him at this critical

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moment should be attributed to his own folly. Besides, had he not declared that he could not so feel for her as a Catholic? Such a declaration only proved the insincerity of his spirit. She felt sorry for him, indeed, but only for his utter blindness to the better interests of his nature; she had no sorrow in knowing that he carried away in his heart a love which she had never desired.

The greater part of the following day she spent in making hasty preparations for her retreat. She spent some hours with Father Daring, who by this time had conceived for her all the affection of a parent. With him she strengthened herself in her resolve to break with her former life forever. She listened to his luminous talks upon doctrinal subjects, during which time, as she afterwards said, she felt her heart burn within her. Florence accompanied her upon these visits, taking in as much of the instructions as her less matured mind could understand.

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It was determined to make this last evening one of ceremonious significance. Father Daring contrived to be at dinner, having finished the afternoon procession of Corpus Christi in good season. When the repast was over, the whole company repaired to the drawing-room. The offensive busts seemed to look with greater hatred than ever upon the unusual apparition of a Catholic priest. Their demolition was quickly accomplished and their fractured remains, gathered into an ash-box, were borne out to the refuse pile.

The niches were then blessed, and the pedestals, which had hitherto supported the effigies of irreligion, now bore the more inspiring figures of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints. The little silver lamps were again lighted by Florence, and the prayers of the Catholic Church were recited in a place that had hitherto listened only to the blasphemies of unbelief.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE entrance of Miriam upon her retreat was like the act of a young novice severing herself forever from the world. Madam Rogers, who had returned from Morton, bringing the assurance that her brother was now recovering from his spell of sickness, had accompanied her niece to the convent doors with Florence and Father Daring. They left her in the care of the Sisters, who seemed glorified with a new joy at welcoming back to the fold this sheep that was lost.

Miriam concealed the emotions that were causing her heart to beat with increasing rapidity, and, as she looked after the carriage bearing her loved ones away, there was only a sigh, more out of the fulness of complete happiness than for any feeling of loneliness. She turned with a smile to

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deliver herself into the hands of the Sister under whose direction she was to remain during these days of study.

“The bell is just ringing for Benediction,” Sister Anita said, “and we will begin our exercises by receiving the blessing of Our Lord. After tea, you will know the order of the exercises which you will pursue.”

As she knelt at her prie-dieu she began to feel ill at ease from a sense of remorse at taking part in that holy ceremony at which she imagined she had no right to be present. Little by little the chants and the prayers of the Sisters, and, more than all, that Presence, — invisible, yet felt, — that sense of a superhuman power, began to cause within her an agitation of heart, to fill her with trouble and trembling. Divine grace was already working its salutary effects within her soul. A rain of tears in voluptuous abundance coursed down her cheeks. She remembered to have wept sometimes in her childhood, but never had she known such tears as these. In the meantime, there

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arose within her bosom, lacerated by the wounds of conscience, a deep sorrow for the evils of her life. The sins of pride, the scorning of Divine light, the neglect of God's bounties came upon her like a whirlwind of wrath, and with a cry from the innermost depths of her being, a cry of the soul, unheard save by God alone, she confessed her impiety, begging forgiveness from Him who had called her out from the vortex and had set her once more in the blessedness of His home.

After tea she received instructions as to how her days were to be spent. Her exercises were to take place only in the morning, beginning with the Holy Sacrifice. At nine o'clock she would receive the instruction of the day from the lips of the Mother Superior, after which she would retire to the chapel, there to reflect upon what she had heard and to beg the light of the Holy Spirit for its understanding. The afternoon she might spend in recreation, walking through the groves or reading some instructive book,

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and at nightfall, before tea, she might visit the Blessed Sacrament and renew her act of faith, begging that her good will be ratified by complete reconciliation with the communion of the Church.

Miriam fell into the spirit of the exercises with an enthusiasm that encouraged the good sisters. She learned that in all these exercises she was acting solely under the influence of her own will, excepting of course the grace of God, without which she might never have begun them at all. She was to be actuated by no ulterior motive of mere pleasure, curiosity, or morbid sentimentality. It was to be for her a week of reasoning, wherein she should consider the various claims of her old life as well as of that which she desired to embrace. She should beg light from the Holy Spirit, and thus, if at the end of her retreat she should not be attracted by the undeniable claims of the religion of Christ, she would be at liberty to go back again to her idols and her paganism. If, on the contrary, she should

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come forth from her week of retirement more firmly convinced that the voice of God was calling to her to go forth out of the marshes of iniquity, then should she again be led to the altar and once more enrolled among the children of God.

The method pursued in her instructions was built upon the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, which led her to consider such questions as the reason of one's existence, the end toward which human life should tend, the Atonement of Christ and its meaning, the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, the questions of death, judgment, hell, and heaven. Gently indeed did the good Sister dwell upon the theme of all other themes to her most dear, the guardianship of the Immaculate Mother. And when the mind had been reduced from its flauntings of pride and made to regard itself as it must appear in the eyes of God, she was shown in vivid colors the characteristics of her past life and those of the life she would embrace. Such was the

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scheme laid out by the Sister instructress and executed with an eloquence and clearness that left no obstacle to conviction.

The old objections which Miriam would formerly have flung in the face of such teachings appeared now in their true colors, as the distorted and twisted threads of a sentimentality that loved to parade itself as solid reasoning. She had also learned that the more one yields to excess of passion, and the nearer one approaches to the animal, the more loudly does he lift up his voice and utter blasphemous platitudes, with that resonance and swelling of the chest which the foolish have accepted as the mark of learning. Miriam listened with the profoundest reverence, as if it were the voice of one of God's messengers that addressed her, and once comprehending a truth, she kept it sacredly within her heart.

CHAPTER XXVII

AND yet the days of this blessed week were not altogether passed in profound reasoning. Her hours of recreation, especially when wandering in the woods, afforded innumerable opportunities for the enjoyment of God's material creation. She loved to take the little children out for these walks, and delighted in the enjoyment they manifested as they ran in and out among the trees gathering the wild flowers into bouquets.

One of these days she was wandering thus, surrounded by a merry troop, down the road, when on arriving before the little yellow cottage in the valley, she came upon a young woman engaged in driving a flock of hens out of her garden. The latter seemed to experience great difficulty in expelling her unwelcome intruders, and as the children were passing she looked up from her task with a worried countenance.

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“Would you not like us to help you ?” Miriam asked with her winsome smile.

“It would be hardly worth the while,” the other replied ; “I think I can manage them in a few minutes more. Of course, if you would like to, I should be happy to have you help.”

“Come, children,” Miriam at once cried ; and the little ones, eager for the opportunity of scattering confusion amongst the unruly fowl, hurried into the garden, driving the hens before them into the inner yard. When they were safely locked in their coops the young woman turned with a laugh to thank her helpers.

“I arrived here only a few days ago,” she said, “and I am quite unused to the ways of country life. I am sometimes in difficulties that must appear comical to other people.”

They conversed in this way for some time, during which Miriam learned that her new acquaintance was named Agnes Brine, and that she was keeping house for her brother, a young man now engaged in

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literary work. Miriam was not slow to perceive the air of cultivation that Agnes carried with her despite her peasantlike surroundings, and when she learned that the poor girl was alone most of the time except for the company of a silent servant, the heart of the young convert was touched with pity.

“You will permit me to come down here in the afternoons?” she begged. “It will be so pleasant, especially as you are a Catholic and we can speak of the things I am so much interested in at present. I am sure you would be delighted to inform me in such matters.”

Agnes was deeply moved by the affectionate tone of this brilliant lady, and was all the more ready to accept her offer when she learned that Miriam was staying for the week at the Convent.

“If it will not interfere with your exercises,” she said, “I should be supremely happy. I have very little to do in the afternoon.”

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And in this way Miriam drew into the circle of her heart's companions that modest flower of city and country, whose whole ambition consisted in the well-being of her brother.

Thursday evening brought quite a number of the fashionable world to the convent chapel. It had been noised abroad that Miriam was then to make a solemn profession of faith, a phrase that had a mysterious sound in the ears of non-Catholics. There was thus an element of curiosity in their zeal to attend, to which curiosity Mother Prudentia yielded, understanding as she did that it might bring to some of their hearts that ray of grace which would be the beginning of an eternal change. Fully half the chapel was reserved for the accommodation of those silken butterflies, who, it must be confessed, observed due reverence in the presence of the most August Sacrament. At five the church was quite filled, the Sisters and the older children crowding into the rear seats, while the

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choir, reinforced to its greatest capacity, gathered about the organ.

To the strains of a quiet voluntary from the organ, the procession entered the chapel by the rear door. Two little boys with lighted candles, preceded by another carrying a crucifix, led the way. These were followed by Miriam and Florence in costumes of white. Their aunt followed proudly behind. The rear of the procession was filled by Father Daring together with the Academy chaplain.

The whole cortège moved slowly up the aisle to the altar, upon which two lighted candles flickered in the midst of a profusion of flowers. Father Daring ascended the steps, and having deposited the Bible, which he was carrying, upon the altar before the Tabernacle, he knelt while the choir sang the hymn of invocation to the Holy Ghost. At its completion he arose and, seated upon a chair placed there for the purpose, he took the Bible from its place and laid it upon his knee. There-

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upon the newly converted advanced and knelt upon the altar-step before him while with their hands upon the Bible they repeated the solemn words of the Profession of Faith, that adjuration of all the errors they had hitherto held, and their belief for the future in all and several of the articles contained in the Catholic creed. Having completed this act, they kissed the sacred volume. Some prayers were then recited in Latin by the officiating priests, after which Miriam and Florence retired to their seats.

Father Daring spoke in a few comprehensive words upon the choice they had made. He pictured the opposing forces of Christ and of Beelzebub. In eloquent words he portrayed the camp of evil at Babylon, as it contrasted with the glorious fields that lay around the golden city of Jerusalem; he showed the powers of iniquity in their atmosphere of smoke, noise, and confusion as compared with the quiet, the sunny clearness and beauty of the army

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that surrounded the Great Captain. He exhorted the neophytes, as they had chosen the standard of the Cross, to lift it up high and bear it bravely into the thickest of the battle, following Him who had laid down His life for them with His head resting upon that emblem of victory. And then he spoke of the sweetness of communion with the mysterious Presence that loves to linger close to the hearts of his followers speaking words of encouragement, of grace, and of direction, and pointing out the holy blessedness that awaits the conquerors under that standard in the immortal homes that are built up beside the great white throne of God.

The tender words of the priest glowing at times with descriptions of the beauty of God's Church, at times waking to sublime eloquence as he traced the fulfilment of Christ's promises in the ever majestic, everlasting constitution of Catholicity, evoked from the hearts of all who listened a feeling of reverence such as they had seldom

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experienced. They bade farewell to Miriam that evening with expressions of a more tender regard than they had before deemed possible.

Friday at length came. Being the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the Mass of the morning was celebrated with unusual solemnity. Miriam and Florence, who had prepared their souls by a long and exhaustive confession the night before, arrayed themselves in their brightest costumes for the reception of the Holy Sacrament, which they received with all the fervor of a first Communion.

It was a morning of happiness all through the great house, for the gentle lady had earned the love of both sisters and pupils. When, therefore, they were leaving for the city, they knew that behind them remained hearts that were sad and eyes that were dim, and many a fervent wish that they would again return with their brightness and loving devotion.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALTHOUGH Miriam had given up her Thursday evening receptions, she had not on that account abandoned society altogether. Her conversion had, in a manner, removed from her contact all such spirits as had formerly led her into the evils of agnosticism. They had left her with a sigh, but with the resolution of seeing her no more. She had put upon herself the stamp of the outcast, and as she showed a disposition to cherish what they esteemed as her folly, they considered it a waste of time to worry themselves about her.

With the resources of the wealth still at her disposal, she found many means of passing the time that formerly dissolved itself in empty disquisitions upon topics which she now regarded with disgust. Father Daring had indicated the needs of the

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many poor of his parish, the little children especially who had grown so used to the privations of poverty as to be callous to the ordinary wants of humanity; the sick in their small unhealthy dwellings, deeming themselves fortunate if they could obtain the mere necessities of life. Miriam found in all these an inexhaustible field for her activities now rendered more restless under the influence of a grace infused with her return to the Faith. She experienced all the more pleasure in these excursions from the feeling that she was thereby aiding the good priest in a work he had hitherto found almost impossible. Her reward was bounteous enough in the sense of a willing sacrifice to God, even if it were not increased by the gratitude of the people to whom she had brought comfort and consolation.

In the midst of her new labors, however, she was destined to meet with an unexpected reverse. The Bishop of the diocese was about to set out for his *ad limina* visit

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to Rome and, in his admiration for the genial qualities of Father Daring, had begged the latter to accompany him upon the journey. The will of his ecclesiastical superior had ever been a law to the good priest, and he accordingly began to prepare for the trip. Miriam heard of his determination and in her feminine way wept over his departure as over the loss of a loved relative.

Her aunt, when she learned of this step of the pastor's, determined that she should accompany him. She had planned to make a similar journey herself within a month, as she would be obliged to journey to Scotland with her sick brother, now in a state of most complete prostration. She thus hastened the date of her sailing by a fortnight, so that when the little party were leaving the depot on the following Thursday evening to proceed to New York, Madam Rogers joined them in their adieus to the faithful young convert.

Miriam returned that night with Florence

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to her home, now rendered even more lonely by the absence of the motherly soul that had lately presided over it. But her heart was stout in accepting these new trials with a spirit of complete reconciliation. "Thy will be done!" was her only remark as she laid her head upon the pillow, confident that God would strengthen her to greater exertions for the very reverses that suggested discouragement.

The figure of the stately young lady now grew to be familiar in the streets that were wont to echo to the footsteps of the old priest, but not less so under the silent arches of St. Placidus at the hour of early Mass, or in the evening just as the Angelus was chiming from the great bells. She had grown to be loved, not more for her prudent generosity to the poor than for the general atmosphere of kindness and goodness that she seemed to carry about with her. It was like a luminous halo emanating from her countenance and casting its mild effulgence all about her person.

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It was during one of these happiest days of her life that she remembered the sad-eyed girl in the lovely house out in the hills, and her heart smote her at the thought that all these weeks, since her retreat, had passed without bringing consolation of companionship into that quiet little household. She determined, however, to repair her negligence as soon as possible ; and so it was that, upon a bright day at the end of June, she set out with Florence to redeem the promise she had made.

Agnes met them at her door with a smile of welcome that showed some little trace of reproach for the tardiness of their arrival ; but she was glad to meet Florence no less than her sister, and showed them into her little parlor. Manley, who had seen the party coming down the hill from the Academy, fled to his room where he hoped to remain in undisturbed solitude. Naturally averse to society, he had become more so since his flight into these wild

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woods, where it was his ardent hope to remain hidden forever. In this he had reckoned without Agnes, whose will in some things was tantamount to law with him. She had determined that he should meet Miss Elaine at the first opportunity, and she lost no time this afternoon in bringing her resolve into execution.

Manley came down reluctantly in obedience to her call, though he warmed up to a cordial welcome as soon as his eyes fell upon the visitors. He was awed, at first, by the austere beauty of the elder sister, of whose whole-souled piety he had already heard so much. As to Florence, her coming was a surprise to him, and so delicate and childlike was her appearance that for some minutes he was led into the error of imagining her as somewhat younger than she really was.

The conversation was very general. They spoke of the beauty of the country, of the many phases of religious thought, the devotion of the good Sisters, and a

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hundred of kindred topics in which there was a community of interest.

Throughout it all the thoughts of Manley were suffering from a very evident pre-occupation. His questions and observations were not always in a line with the drift of the discussions. Shy at all times, he seemed to-day even bashful, so much so as to occasion much uneasiness to his sister, usually proud of his accomplishments. Florence also was for the most part mute, sitting in almost stately solemnity throughout the visit as if the whole affair were tedious and best soon over. There was at the same time a general feeling that this meeting was to mean much for the future companionship of those engaged; so that when the party broke up Miriam went away with a new sense of happiness.

Manley and his sister talked of it that evening at tea, and when Agnes declared her fear that the impression Miriam had left upon her brother might lead to serious

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hopes within his heart, the latter boldly declared that he was not at all attracted by her too serious air, which to him savored unduly of the solemnity of the cloisters.

"Do you know, Agnes," he said, "that although I admire and reverence Miss Elaine, I feel as if she were already devoted to One who will claim her entirely. She seems moulded in the lines of austere sanctity, too exalted that such as I should dare to look up to her."

Agnes laughed heartily at his appreciation of her new friend.

"Why, Manley, I believe Miss Elaine would be immensely amused to hear you say that. From all that she has shown, I should judge that her one and only reason for this impulse of devotion is that she may be able to entirely cast off her old ideas."

"It may be so," he answered with a shrug. "Nevertheless, she stands upon an elevation far too high for my attentions."

"Oh, in that way! Yes, I believe she is

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the last woman in the world to be troubled by what men may think about her. At the same time she is a woman of heart, and can reciprocate a true friendship when it is given her."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE Elaines came out again a week after, when a pleasant afternoon invited to such an excursion. They found Agnes upon the veranda tracing upon tapestry a figure of Hope, a charming female in Grecian costume standing with face uplifted, her hands clasped behind her neck, thus displaying the rounded contour of her arms.

“Ah!” thought Miriam, as she gazed admiringly upon the work, “there is more in the mind of this modest little woman than is shown in her appearance.” Later also she took occasion to observe to Florence that there was something in the very atmosphere around these two lovely people that spoke of a training much higher than was required for the simple life they were leading. “There is a mysterious sadness in all that they say and do. It tells me

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that they have suffered more than we can comprehend."

Florence, to whose mind an air of mystery carried with it the charm of romance, looked upon the strange brother and sister with admiring eyes as if she feared that close contact with such ethereal natures might cause the vision of them to dissolve and leave her in the midst of cold realities. She chose a chair at the extreme end of the veranda looking out upon the distant hills, so that when Manley came down from his den she seemed not to have seen him. He went straight to her as soon as he had paid his respects to Miriam and sat near, the better to hold her in conversation.

The two elder ladies grew very tedious as they delved into the intricacies of the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive lives, too misty for Manley and too profound for Florence.

"Let us go down to the pond," he ventured, rising at the same time and including the others in his invitation. He knew that

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his sister could not easily rise from her work at such sudden proposal, and, moreover, he could not help feeling that neither she nor Miriam would care to relinquish the theme of their little tête-à-tête for so ordinary an affair as a walk down the road.

“Perhaps Florence would like to accompany you,” Miriam suggested. “Agnes and I would prefer to remain here a little longer.”

Florence acceded to the arrangement with a blush of self-consciousness, rather to oblige her dear sister than from any desire on her own part. She walked down the path with Manley, and out upon the road, and the two made a very pretty picture against the green foliage of the overhanging woods. It was only when they had turned the corner a little farther down that the pair upon the veranda adverted to the suddenness of the proceeding. Then it was that Agnes, with a little thrill of alarm in her voice, called the attention of her companion to the affair.

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“Do you think it is exactly proper for them to go off that way together upon such slight acquaintance?” she asked, dropping her brush and looking into the face of the other.

“I did not think of it in that way,” said Miriam. “Florence is so young, you know, a little more than eighteen. I am sure she thinks your brother quite an ancient.”

“That may be so. Yet you know what they say of human nature. The tenderest hearts are the most susceptible under the influence of sweet words. I must caution Manley to use more care in the future.”

“He seems to me quite superior to feelings of that kind,” Miriam contended; not however, without a little tremor that told of inward anxiety. “Of course I should not wish them to build up romantic conceptions of each other.”

Both the young women arose as if by preconcerted agreement, and placing the tapestry safely away, set off to join the strollers. They found them, a few minutes later,

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leaning over the railing of the bridge that crossed the pond.

There was an appearance of contentment on the faces of both the fugitives as the elder sisters approached, and Florence, as if to explain the reason for her happiness, began to expatiate with enthusiasm upon the beauty of the scenery, the soft smoothness of the waters, the deep colors of the foliage upon the near hills, and the kine browsing in the meadows. Miriam, who had often regretted her sister's want of animation, felt a thrill of pleasure that she could derive enthusiasm from so innocent a source.

"It is much more pleasant than the dull streets of the city," she said as she placed her arm around the slim waist of her sister. "Come, Florence; it will not do for you to become infatuated with a little country scene. I fear Mr. Brine has been throwing an artificial glamour over its ordinary attractiveness by his words. That is not kind to Agnes and myself, who would be pleased to

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hear how a poet would weave his fancies about the beauties of rural life."

"Do you know, Miss Elaine," Agnes interposed, "you will find that Manley has within him a mine of poetry that needs only the occasion to burst forth into the most romantic rhapsodies. Manley, are you not ashamed to have cheated us like this?"

"Not at all, Agnes," the latter replied laughingly. "You know well enough that I invited you both to come with us. But you preferred your own society to ours. Who is then to blame?"

"He is right," Miriam pleaded. "We owe the loss to ourselves. But we warn you, Mr. Brine, that we shall not permit you this privilege again. We shall exact our right to listen to all your best poetry in the future."

"That is flattery such as I should never have expected. I am sure you are heartily welcome to any little excursion I shall make after this, and I hope we shall

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have many opportunities to wander over these lovely pieces of landscape."

It was now time for the Elaines to return. As they went back, therefore, to the cottage Miriam took advantage to pour many a little word of caution into the ears of Florence, all of which that young woman received with a puzzled look and a deep blush. There were tears in the eyes of the three girls as they bade good-night under the porch, and much waving of hands as the carriage drove away with the two sisters.

CHAPTER XXX

THE warm days of July sped by with a rapidity unusual to the calm, deliberative nature of Manley Brine. The visits of the Elaines had grown more and more frequent, until an intimacy almost like that of family life had grown up. The absence of Madam Rogers and of Father Daring had removed effectually any barrier to the freedom of intercourse between the house in the city and that in the country; nor was there any likelihood that any such obstacle might arise, as the aunt could not return before the end of the month at the earliest. Father Daring's progress to Rome Miriam had learned, not only from his considerate letters, but also from the accounts given of him in the daily papers. She felt, therefore, that a great responsibility lay upon her shoulders, which, while she desired to meet with all due watchfulness, she

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would not on that account render burdensome to others by unnecessary restrictions.

The friendship of her younger sister and Manley had grown apace, ripening from day to day into that tender sentiment which a young man might feel for a young woman of the appearance and character of Florence. There came at length a time when the regards of the young people had become so palpable as not to escape even the careless observations of their sisters. It was necessary, therefore, to define the positions and intentions of those concerned in order to insure the peace of all.

When Manley came to put the question squarely before his own consciousness he was confronted for the first time by an obstacle he had not hitherto well considered. It was quite evident that Florence was expecting some formal expression of his intentions towards her. Yet how was this to be made in the face of his present difficulties? Even if he were not hampered by the appearance of poverty, there was still

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the ever recurring spectre of the tragedy, and its awful imputation to him. Was it right under such circumstances to permit the continuance of his former intimacy? Should he not at once undeceive the child? Then there came to him the hope, ever present in his heart, that something must transpire to set him in his proper light before the world. He had indeed often determined to clear himself upon trial; but when he considered the awful evidence that circumstances might bring against him he recoiled from the attempt with a feeling of weakness. Now this resolve came back into his heart with renewed force, as he contemplated that it was the only means by which he might put himself into a position worthy of the young girl who had confided so trustingly in his honor. A variety of problems arose in connection with this resolve, among which one of the most serious was in regard to the manner in which Miriam might receive him even after he should prove his innocence. Was there

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not a stain upon him even from the mere imputation? Had he not acted dishonorably in encouraging the sentiments of Florence while yet laboring under a cloud? What should he do about it in any case?

In the extremity of his anguish he spent his nights without the blessing of sleep, tossing about on his pillow, haunted by difficulties he could not solve.

“Agnes, Agnes!” he cried one day, as he buried his face in his hands, “God help me! I never knew until now what it is to suffer. I must have help, Agnes, or I fear that my senses will leave me.”

His sister placed her arm about his neck and for answer pointed to the heavens. Manley, however, refused to consider the soothing influence of prayer, and could only cry out bitterly, —

“What have we done that all these evils should have befallen us? Have we not always trusted in God, and prayed and labored for His honor and glory? I cannot pray.”

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Nevertheless, he followed her advice in so far as to go down to the village church, where, falling upon his knees before the Tabernacle, he poured forth all the pain of his heart to God. He rose up from his prayer comforted, and with the firm resolve to restore the honor of his name, even at the risk of prison or death. A general confession and a fervent Holy Communion the next morning completed his act of confidence in God.

“Agnes,” he said after Mass the next morning, “I have made up my mind to settle this affair for good or for ill.”

“You do not mean, Manley, that you are about to visit the Chief of Police?”

“I am indeed. I cannot help feeling that there is something about Mr. Rogers’ death that has never been told to me. I reasoned it out with the priest last night at confession. He thinks it very peculiar that, if a murder were ever suspected, I have never been legally notified or threatened. He is convinced that our

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uncle and other interested parties are only making capital out of our predicament, and, therefore, that the sooner we challenge him the better."

"Oh, Manley, if it is that way, then go, in God's name. I would not keep you away from any chance to clear yourself as long as there is any hope of success."

Manley packed away in a satchel such articles as he would need for an absence of a day or two, and after an affectionate parting with his sister set off for the train.

CHAPTER XXXI

ON arriving in the city he proceeded at once to the house of the Elaines.

He found Miriam in the reception-room, pacing the floor in some agitation. When her eyes fell upon him she ceased her promenade and regarded him with calm scrutiny. He advanced, holding out his hand, an action of which she appeared to take no notice, as she continued to hold her own hands clasped behind her back. Manley gazed at her in astonishment.

“Mr. Brine,” she said at length, coldly, “I am sorry you have deceived us so grossly. We believed you to be a man of the highest honor, we confided in you as sisters in a brother, while all the time you were concealing in your heart a most awful stain. Do you think that was just to me? Was it not cruel to my poor sister, whom

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you led on to such blind devotion to you?"

This and much more she uttered in the bitterness of her heart while Manley stood like one petrified beside the open door. When she had finished he advanced a step nearer.

"What you have said, Miss Elaine, is partly true and partly the result of a mistake. That I might be suspected of wrong I acknowledge; that such wrong was ever committed by me or by any one else I deny. Do you know, Miss Elaine, why I have called upon you to-day? It is in reference to this very matter. I came to tell you all I know of it, and then to say farewell, perhaps forever."

"No, Manley! It is useless to excuse yourself. That you are innocent of the charge some one would attach to your name I am fully convinced. I know nothing of it, nor do I care to know anything of it. What has made you appear dishonorable is nothing of that sort; it is rather your

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continued impositions upon us. Had you told us your plight in the beginning, you would have found in us your truest friends ; now that you have deceived us, what can you expect except the most cold indifference ! You are going to clear yourself. I shall pray for you that God may give you His aid. Beyond that, we wish to see you or hear from you no more."

She was leaving the room when Manley begged her for just one word more.

"Pray tell me, Miss Elaine," he asked, "if it would not be out of place, — how did you know of this difficulty of mine ?"

"Oh, you shall know. Here is a letter I received yesterday. It may be you will recognize the signature. You may read it."

Manley took the note tremblingly into his hands and read : —

"MISS ELAINE, — Knowing of your unprotected position at the present time, I take the liberty to warn you against an acquaintance you have made, a certain

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Manley Brine. I call him unworthy because he bears upon his name the imputation of a crime committed two months ago. You may be inclined to treat this information lightly; if so you will undeceive yourself by calling for this Brine and putting the question to him directly. I write for your good, dear madam, and I sincerely trust my information will not be received unkindly. I am, etc.,

“GEOFFREY DAUNT.”

Miriam noted the wretched expression of Manley's countenance as his eyes sped along the lines of this epistle, and when he had finished she asked, —

“And now, sir; shall I take this note seriously or not?”

“It is an infamous falsehood. I know the fellow, and I know that he has written this letter merely to harm me.”

“You know Geoffrey Daunt?”

“I have many reasons to know him. And now my dear madam, since one of

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your friends has thus endeavored to prejudice you against me, it shall be my purpose to rest neither night nor day until I can bring back upon him the slander he has uttered. I am sorry that I have inconvenienced you ; it tears my very heart that my behavior should have in the slightest degree brought sorrow to your dear sister. But when I have finished you will not blame me."

"Let us hope so."

She said no more, but with a stately sweep of the hand motioned Manley to leave, while she, on her part, turned away and passed through the portières into the adjoining room.

CHAPTER XXXII

MANLEY found a cab at the nearest street corner, and jumping into it, gave an address to the driver. In a moment he was being carried toward his old home. The time that passed in this manner he employed in reflecting more seriously upon his unique position.

The more he considered it now, in the light of the events that had just transpired, the more he became convinced that his uncle had all the while been playing a trick upon him. He had no doubt of Mr. Rogers' death, as the physician in attendance had clearly pronounced the case fatal. But could it not, after all, be possible that the accident had been the mere effect of drunkenness, and as such, have been proven entirely free from any foreign intervention ? Meanwhile, the astute Evar-

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istus had been living upon the fruits of a fortune that belonged to his nephew and niece, and, according to the ordinary contingencies in natures like his, he would continue to enjoy such fruits until claimed by their rightful owners.

The young man was too deeply concerned about his own safety all the while to consider what he should do in case he could prove a fraud on the part of his uncle; in his generosity of heart he felt that the clearing of his good name, and the complete restoration of his father's estate would be sufficient compensation for all the evils he had borne from the treachery of Evaristus.

His uncle was not at home when he arrived, but the butler on opening the door went into a rapture of surprised delight at beholding his young master once more. He showed the traveller to his room, which he declared, had been kept in readiness for him since the day he left. It must be confessed that a thrill of remorse passed through

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the heart of Manley as he received this intelligence of his uncle's kindly concern for his welfare, a thrill that very soon calmed itself in the thought of the long silence of almost two months. Nevertheless, he dissembled his suspicions and accepted the hospitalities offered him as if they had been the result of heartfelt generosity and fatherly solicitude.

His uncle did not return for dinner. In fact, the butler showed Manley a note he had just received wherein Evaristus, still unconscious of his nephew's arrival, informed the servant that he could not return before morning.

"Very well!" Manley declared, "it will give me the more time to become used to the old place again. James," he said with a gay laugh, feeling for the moment a touch of the boyish humor that had once made these halls ring, "I want you to bring me a bottle of that old Sauterne that we were wont to have on occasions of rejoicing in the house. I have not tasted wine since I left

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here, and now, like a returned prodigal, I wish to come as near as possible to the fatted calf."

"It's here, sir," James replied, producing the bottle from its case. "I knowed you would call for it. It's been the custom of the family, sir, for years gone by, to celebrate the goin's and the comin's by a sip of it, and I knowed you had not lost the family likin's in your travels."

"Very good, James. There, you may take a glass of it yourself for remembrance, as they say. What, no? You have not become a teetotaler, have you?"

"Yes, sir. No kind of liquor passes my lips now, nor has since you went away. I've seen enough of the ruin it brings, and I don't want its curse on me."

"I won't press you, James. I would not take it myself but for the fact that it brings back to me the faces of those who were used to sip it at this same table when I was a boy. Ah, James, those days will never again return; never again!"

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Manley applied himself vigorously to the generous dinner placed before him. He drank his glass of Sauterne with a relish, and finished the repast with a cigar from the case at his side.

They talked of the days of his boyhood, of the times when he played with his sister in these now dingy rooms. In speaking of the events that had happened in his absence he learned much from the butler of his uncle's extravagances.

"Aw! 'e's not the same mon, at all as 'e was. 'E's dopy an' thin, an' weak like. 'E's 'ad a pain in 'is gall sometimes, an' in 'is 'eart at others, an' 'e walks like a ghost oop an' down the 'ouse. 'E's goin' fast, I'm afeard."

Manley said no more upon the subject. They conversed in a quiet way for an hour more, when, as he felt tired out from the fatigues of the journey, he procured his candle and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN he awoke the following morning, the sound of unusual traffic in the adjoining streets brought him quickly to a sense of his situation. Although he had nothing particular to call him from his rest, he arose early with the intention of hearing Mass at the Cathedral, and was in the act of descending the stairs from his room when he met the butler approaching with a note.

“There was a messenger below gave me this. You had better read it; it concerns your uncle.”

Manley took the note and read: “James — come to the Burdige Hospital at once. I am very ill. Brine.”

“We will go up together,” he said, handing back the writing. “You can call a cab.”

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"I've done it already, sir. I knowed you 'd want it."

"Very well, James."

They found the cab waiting at the door, and entering it, were soon flying uptown. Within a half hour they arrived at the hospital. They found Evaristus in one of the private rooms, in bed, and in an agony of pain. His astonishment at beholding his nephew had the effect of driving away the acuteness of his sufferings, and he sat up upon the pillows to gaze upon him the better.

"You here, Manley?" he exclaimed. "I had no notion you were in the city."

"Oh, uncle, it was a sudden determination on my part that brought me. But, let us talk about yourself first. How did this happen?"

The reference to his condition recalled the sick man to a sense of his sufferings. He groaned and twisted for some minutes without answering the question; it was only when the nurse had entered and administered a soothing dose that he could

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calm himself sufficiently to recall the occasion of his presence in the hospital.

He had been attending a little time, he said, down town, a sort of pooling affair. He had played heavily, gaining and losing with equal regularity throughout the night. Towards the morning, his luck abandoned him and his money began to fly from his fingers with alarming rapidity. At the end of the game he had risen without a cent in his pockets. He was about to leave the gambling den with the resolution of never again entering its accursed portals, when a sudden stroke of his old complaint came upon him. The pain was so acute that he lost consciousness. An ambulance was called and he was brought to this place.

"It is the old story, Manley," he groaned; "drink, gaming, and late hours. I feel that it holds me now for good. I shall never rise from this bed again."

"How do you know, uncle? Did the physician say so?"

"I don't need the word of a physician

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for that. A man knows when he is going to die, and I know it now."

Manley was somewhat impressed by the conviction of his uncle. He was, indeed, much changed since the night of the fatality. The hollow cheeks, the toothless gums, the wasted hands, and his generally sallow complexion could mean, for him, nothing less than the total collapse of his physical health. To one who had known him as well as Manley, he was fairly upon the verge of the grave. Nevertheless, he determined to consult the attending doctor before coming to any such conclusion.

"Yes," the physician answered, "Mr. Brine will certainly die under this attack. I cannot see how we can save him. If his general system were strong he might have some hope ; but in his debilitated condition the best science in the world is of no avail."

As Manley returned to the sick man, he debated with himself as to how he should inform him exactly of his condition, fearing that the expression of a professional

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decision might have a disastrous effect upon his already low spirits. Evaristus, however, seemed to divine the problem that was puzzling his nephew's mind, and said, with a laugh: "Oh, you need not fear to let me know the worst, Manley. I can see from your eyes that the doctor has told you all. I am going to die, and there is no way of avoiding it."

"But, uncle, if you are so firmly convinced that you will not live, let me ask, are you prepared to die?"

"Prepared? About as well prepared as ever."

"That means not at all, uncle. Have you no fear for your soul? Do you want to meet your God without doing something to repair the evils of your life?"

The man gazed at Manley and laughed. "What is all this, Manley, about soul, God, evils of life? That sort of talk will do for church people."

"Nevertheless, you will see a priest, will you not?"

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“What for? Priests are no more to me than Chinese. My boy, don’t bother me with such things. Are you afraid I shall not arrange your affairs before I go? They are all in readiness for you now. I tell you, though, Manley; I would like to see poor little Agnes before I die.”

“Yes, if it is possible. She is now many miles away.”

“Send for her; I’ll see her. I’ll make my confession to her. Will you send for her?”

“I will despatch immediately. She can be here this evening. But I wish you would do that one thing for me. Let me call the priest to you.”

“What good will it do? He could never save me with all the blessings ever invented. Manley, I have grown to hate the very name of a priest.”

“He certainly can do you no harm. I will send for one and then, if you do not wish to confess I shall bother you no more about it.”

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Manley had determined that the sick man should make his peace with God. The business upon which he had come might wait even though it should never have been accomplished. The duty of his religion was paramount to all others. Besides, he knew that if that were once attended to, the rectification of any crooked work in the matter of Mr. Rogers' death would result of necessity.

With these thoughts in his mind he left the hospital and repaired to the nearest parish church. One of the priests, a saintly soul, whose countenance glowed with eloquent persuasion, agreed to accompany Manley, and within a quarter of an hour was standing by the bed of the sick man.

Manley left them alone during the time that should be necessary for confession, with the agreement that when the minister of God should have accomplished the task, he should be recalled. He waited long in the office of the hospital, utilizing the time in sending a despatch to Agnes.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN, at length, a full half-hour had elapsed before the appearance of the priest Manley began to feel that something unusual must have transpired. He knew that there was no angry refusal on the part of his uncle, since if such had been the case the sound of his words would have reached to the outside. And yet it appeared almost miraculous that a conversion should have been effected within so short a time. Presently the door opened and the priest, his countenance glowing with the happiness of success stepped forth and beckoned him to enter.

Manley was agreeably surprised at the sight which now met his eyes. He beheld his uncle propped up upon the pillows with a smile full of contentment upon his features. In his hands, clasped upon his chest, he held a crucifix attached to a rosary.

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His whole demeanor displayed in him the change that takes place so often through the ministry of the Confessional when a soul grown desperate through the hopelessness of years of sin is made to glow with the warmth of true faith and hope and supernatural love.

As he perceived his nephew he beckoned to him to approach.

“Manley,” he said, “I was going to be angry with you and to refuse the priest because at the time I knew no better. Now I thank God that you acted for me so promptly. I have made my confession, and the priest has instructed me as to what I should do in order to make up, as far as possible, for the life I have led. And I have very important information to give you yet, before I shall be fully at peace. I was going to wait until Agnes should arrive; but the father tells me that the sooner I enlighten you upon the matter, the better, especially as the news will bear repetition when Agnes comes.”

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The sick man rested for a moment, and as soon as he had taken some refreshment just then brought in by the nurse he resumed his recital.

“Nurse,” he said, “I wish you would remain a few minutes. You might also call James again if he has not already gone home, and the priest also. I have an important confession to make, to which I would like to have you act as witnesses.”

The nurse was unsuccessful in his search for James, who had already left the hospital. The priest he found seated patiently upon a bench in the outer office. The holy man, thoroughly filled with zeal for the complete reconciliation of his penitent, repaired eagerly to the sick-room. When Evaristus saw that he was present he began to relate his story.

“I have called you here,” he said, “to let you know that I have deeply wronged my nephew. My injustice to him and to his patient sister began long ago, after the death of their father. I had been ap-

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pointed executor of the will and guardian of the children. I began at once to be deficient in both these trusts. I was cruel to my nephew and niece, and the income of their property I squandered in gambling and extravagance. That much my nephew knew even at the time. What he does not know yet is the great wrong I perpetrated two months ago on the day when my nephew and niece fled in fear from the city. Upon that day a certain Mr. Rogers, a man very much addicted to the liquor habit, was found apparently dead in one of the rooms of our house. All the circumstances at the time pointed to the crime of murder, especially as there was found in the mouth of the unfortunate a small vial bearing upon its side the word 'poison.' I thereupon called a physician, who pronounced the man dead, but out of regard for the good name of my nephew he agreed to report the case as a direct effect of alcoholism. With the aid of the physician, I prevailed upon these young

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relatives of mine to seek safety in flight, as there could be no doubt that a conviction could easily be fixed upon my nephew. I had hoped, by keeping them at a distance, and practically outlawed, to enjoy all the longer the fruits of their inheritance. They grasped at the bait I had thrown and disappeared that very morning. Since then I have heard from them, but have consistently refused to answer any of their letters.

“Now, Manley, listen. Mr. Rogers did not die. You seem incredulous, but it is so. When he was brought home that morning, another physician was called who detected signs of pulsation in his heart. He remained unconscious for three days, after which he gradually regained his physical health. You wonder why you have not heard of him in all this time? I will tell you why. Upon coming out of his unconsciousness the unfortunate man was able to explain his condition upon that eventful day. In the cupboard in which

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he usually kept his whiskey, were a number of these small bottles, all labelled 'poison,' but yet containing nothing more than alcoholic liquor. He had written the word upon them in order to ward off the temptation of tasting them from a young servant of the house, whom he had discovered to be very fond of intoxicating drinks. In leaving his house to go to ours, he had carried one of these in his pocket. This little draught, together with the copious potations imbibed before he had left his own house, had hurried on the temporary collapse which we had taken for death.

"Mr. Rogers never recovered fully from the effects of that accident. Scarcely was he able to be about when he was stricken with a hemorrhage of the brain. His sister was forced to have him placed in an asylum. He remained there about a month, when, as he appeared to be somewhat convalescent, he was taken to Scotland and confined in a sanatorium. There, as far as I know, he now remains. So much,

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Manley, in regard to Mr. Rogers' apparent death. I know the wrong I have done both you and my poor Agnes, and I have promised, if God gives me strength to rise from this bed, to do all in my power to rectify it. Now, tell me, Manley, you will forgive me, will you not?"

The answer of Manley was a caress and a whispered word of consolation, while all the listeners about the bed were deeply affected by the scene. But the increasing weakness of the patient now convinced the nurse that the excitement had proven prejudicial to his comfort. He therefore begged the young man and his friends to leave him in quiet and solitude for the next few hours.

"I shall call you up by telephone," he said, "if anything serious should occur."

Manley bade an affectionate good morning to his now thoroughly penitent uncle, and with the priest left the room.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE visit of Manley Brine had thrown Miriam into a fever of perplexity. The thought that the friend in whom she had most trusted, who seemed to be the very incarnation of those principles which had drawn her to the Catholic faith, had now proven an impostor, was like a blow at the very foundations of her being. In her frenzied grief there came again to her mind the words of Geoffrey Daunt as he commented upon the make-up of Catholic society: "Drunkards, blasphemers, robbers, burglars, prison-birds." Was the thoughtless scoffer, after all, right in his enumeration? Then she thought of the gentle priest who had first beckoned her on like an angelic messenger from God, against whose powerful appeal she could evoke no faculty of resistance. She began to look upon the apparent

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treachery of Manley in the light in which she imagined that Father Daring would regard it, and thus it resolved itself into one of those great exceptions to a rule which the thoughtless and prejudiced have ever taken for the rule itself.

In her instructions she had been taught that the commission of sin rendered the perpetrator virtually at enmity with the Church, to which he could never be reconciled in this world or in the next except through the sacramental avowal and denunciation of his crime. Who, then, were those malefactors so ignominiously included in the rank and file of Catholicity by the hatred of her old admirer? Were they anything more than the dead and rotten limbs that hang their crushing weight upon a fair body in the hope that sometime the rich blood might rush from the palpitating heart, driving out the sin and bringing new health and vigor? Was not this condition infinitely better than the dry, polished leprosy that infected the world outside the

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influences of the Catholic faith, — that utter ignorance of morality, of true nobility of soul which shameless impudence, inspired no doubt by the spirit of evil, had elevated into a virtue and endowed with a high sounding name?

How it tires one to listen to the pride which would lift its littleness against the very grandeur of God! Like Lucifer, inflamed with vanity, it raises the weapons of its clangorous language and hurls them in defiance of the Almighty, only to fall back unsuccessful, despairing, crushed, into that vortex whence came its first inspirations. It is that pride which in the loftiness of luxury, of that wealth which Satan promised to the Lord if He would fall down and adore him, points to the poverty of so many of the children of God, and builds an argument against the sanctity of the Church from the petty evils that some misguided Catholics had committed in defiance of her sacred laws.

In this way Miriam learned to regard

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the action of Manley in a more personal light, and entirely apart from the action of the great universal Church. She recognized, moreover, that all might possibly not be as evil as it seemed. Would it be just in her to pass judgment so soon, before she had learned the nature and motives of Manley's conduct? Her attitude towards the culprit's memory grew softer under the united spell of prayer and reflection, until she found it possible even to forgive, provided he should succeed in removing all imputation of guilt from his name.

Under the stress of such considerations she arose from her prayer and went with greater reconciliation to confront her sister. She found Florence in her room busy upon a letter to her aunt.

"I am glad you have come, Miriam," she said as the latter entered. "I am in the greatest perplexity as to how I shall inform auntie of our last few visits to the Brines. The matter is so delicate, you know; and she might not regard Manley as we do."

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Miriam sat beside her sister and for a moment was silent. At length, she took up the letter and read what was written.

"Are you quite sure," she asked at length, "that Manley really feels that way to you, Florence?"

"Oh, there cannot be any doubt. It would be cruel in him to feel otherwise after all his extraordinary attentions to me. And I am sure that I like him as much. I know he will mention it before long, although I am sure he is only waiting for auntie's return, in order not to take an unfair advantage of her absence."

"What would you think, Florence, if I were to tell you that Manley has been acting in an unworthy manner all the time?"

"Why, what can you mean, sister?"

"I mean just what I have said. I have here a letter, the reading of which may undeceive your mind in his regard. Manley Brine has been carrying on a deception with you and me. This letter from

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Geoffrey accuses him of implication in a crime committed in this city two months ago, and it appears that he sought the quiet of the Wayland Hills for no other purpose than to conceal himself from justice."

"And do you believe it, Miriam?" Florence asked the question with an expression of pain. "You will not listen to such a falsehood, sister, will you?"

"Of course," the latter answered, "I do not believe that Manley was really guilty; but I know that he actually fled from the scene with the charge of the crime upon him; in other words that he is hiding from justice. He was therefore a criminal."

"But how do you know this?"

"He has told me, himself. He has been here this morning to bid us farewell. He is now engaged in bringing the matter to a settlement. Do you think it was fair for him, Florence, to have kept this from us so long?"

CHAPTER XXXVI

FLORENCE said nothing. She bent her head upon her arms upon the table, and when Miriam went to comfort her for the harshness of the blow she had given, the young girl had fainted.

"I have been foolish," Miriam said to herself, "to have spoken so soon. She would have found it out for herself; but then, I am afraid the anguish would have been fatal rather than merely depressing."

Florence was put to bed, and the usual means of restoration employed. In her case they proved unavailing, so that Miriam was compelled to send for a physician. The latter came and immediately pronounced the sickness quite serious.

"The child has received some severe shock that has affected her heart. There is no danger that you need apprehend, though it will require some time and assid-

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uous care before she can be completely restored. She must have received some bad news; is it not so?"

Miriam answered in the midst of her tears. The physician left his prescription and promising to call again, left the house.

The afflicted sister sat at the bedside all that morning and far into the afternoon, gazing upon the still unconscious form of Florence. The first tears had dried in her eyes and had given way to that utter hopelessness which knows not the luxury of weeping. With her hands clasped before her bosom she swayed from side to side like one distraught, uttering no word, but only gazing as if her eyes would fly from their sockets. The impulse to grow angry at this new trial sent her from the hand of God arose in her heart, but with an act of purest faith she put it back again, resolving that she would be true whatever might befall. It was rather a sense of love divinely inspired that now began to flood her soul, and under its influence she offered herself more

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completely to the dispensations of the Divine will.

“Thy will be done, O Lord, thy will be done!”

When the afternoon was far advanced, and yet the child had shown no return of consciousness, the distracted sister sent again for the physician. He was already at hand, however, and coming into the room examined the patient. He smiled at the end of his work, and looking up declared that the girl was quickly overcoming her stupor.

“In a quarter of an hour she will be conscious,” he said. “That does not mean that she will be well; she will need even more quiet during the rest of the afternoon, and I would advise you, madam, for the child’s sake, to leave her until the evening. It will be better for her to imagine that she is merely awaking from sleep.”

Miriam recognized the justice of the physician’s advice and retired to her own room. Here once more, her eyes recovered their

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power and she gave vent to her feelings in copious tears. She was conscious that it would be hurtful for her to remain in idleness while her whole soul was thus plunged in suffering. She took up her pen and began to transcribe the words of a sublime prayer for consolation to the Blessed Virgin, but her heart misgave her and she let the pen fall to the floor in her nervousness. Again she picked it up and began a letter to her aunt. Her ideas flowed more smoothly and the sheet was soon filled with the story of her late trials. She expatiated upon the guilt of Manley Brine, the infatuation he had inspired in the heart of Florence, and the shock which had come upon the latter upon learning the character of her hero. She begged her aunt, if it should be at all possible, to hurry her return, as it seemed as if her trials were accumulating more rapidly than she could bear, bringing with them temptations to hopelessness and distrust in God.

When the letter was finished, feeling still

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the need of giving vent to her feelings in this manner, she wrote to Mother Prudentia at the Academy, telling her how the trouble had come about and begging her to hasten, if possible, to the side of her suffering daughter. She despatched the two letters and felt comforted in the thought that they would awaken sympathy in two loving hearts.

At twilight she found Florence sitting up in bed, looking tired and pale. The child had not forgotten through her unconsciousness the misfortune that brought it about, so that when she again beheld her sister the old anguish came back to her heart. This time, however, she was stronger, and instead of sinking again into faintness, she only lay back upon the pillow and moaned.

"Florence," Miriam said as she put her hand under the child's head, "do you not know that it is not brave to give way like this to sorrow? Have you forgotten the counsels you received from the good Sisters when they were teaching you the catechism?"

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"But, oh, Miriam! It is so hard! I cannot believe it, even though you tell me."

"Well, perhaps, child, it was not as bad as I made it seem. We will wait for the news; it must arrive soon. We will send for Agnes if you wish."

"Do, Miriam dear! I would rather see Manley as he was — but now, of course, it is impossible. He will never come here again."

"Florence, do not say that. Let us forget him, at least until we know more. Agnes will be able to enlighten us. I am sure she will come. I will send a man immediately to bring her, so that she may be here before it is late."

Florence twined her arms about the neck of her sister, and together they rested upon the pillow uttering those little dream conceits that love inspires in such hearts. She arose as soon as she saw that the child was again calm, and gave the order to a servant to send immediately for Agnes Brine.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IT was while they were sitting together in the dim light of the setting sun that their thoughts turned upon the mysteriousness of the divine dispensations towards men, and their hearts thus strengthened by the power of grace yielded with readiness to the trials they were enduring.

“I have no doubt,” Miriam said, “that these sufferings were sent us for some good purpose. To know what that purpose may be, it will be necessary for us to bear them patiently to the end ; though I have heard that the good inspirations one feels in moments like these are but the voice of God speaking within us.”

“Do you think so?” Florence asked dreamily. “Do you know, Miriam, that since I have lain here during the last half hour, it seems as if I had heard a voice call-

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ing me to sacrifice. What it may mean, I cannot tell."

"The greatest sacrifice is that of one's will. What one wishes for most, what one desires more than life and health itself, whatever is most longingly yearned after, that is truly one's will, and therefore, to sacrifice that is to perform the utmost act of homage to God, provided, of course, it do not conflict with the just happiness and rights of others."

"What do you think I desire most, Miriam?"

"I am sure I do not know. What do you think yourself?"

"It would be difficult to sacrifice you, Miriam dear, would it not? Do you think God would require that of me?"

"Most surely He would not. But are there not other things less dutiful than my presence with you that you could give up?"

"Why, yes! Oh, Miriam, I see it all now. How stupid I was not to think of it before!"

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“And what is it, child?”

“Manley Brine.”

“Are you ready to sacrifice your attachment for Manley if you are convinced that it is God’s will?”

“I am willing to do anything that God may require of me. I never felt so strongly about it before. Now it seems almost like an inspiration that I should do this.”

Miriam patted the cheek of her sister with a smile. “Believe me, Florence; God will yet reward you for such sweet renunciation.”

Again both fell under the spell of silence as if the greatness of their thoughts had prevented further utterance. At length Florence broke the silence with a sigh.

“Miriam,” she said, “how I would like it if God were to call me to the convent! I believe I should be happy to take the veil.”

“If it be God’s will it will happen. Have a care, however, that such a wish be not the mere result of an idle moment.

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To be a real inspiration from God it is necessary that it proceed from reflection and be decided after long and serious trial. You have much to learn yet of such things, and so do not dwell too deeply upon them lest you be disappointed at the end."

"I know well enough, Miriam, that I am not worthy of such a high vocation after our former lives of unbelief. I believe our trials are only in punishment of wickedness during those years."

"Let us, then, be all the more grateful that God permits us to make our reparation here rather than in the long hereafter. But come, dear! I think you ought to sleep a little. I will leave you in order that you may not be disturbed."

"No, do not leave me. Let us remain quiet if you like, but do not leave me alone. I will feel better every moment that I can see you."

Miriam, therefore, took up a book that lay upon the table, and began to read it aloud. It was a volume of Father Faber,

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and the passages she read were full of that sweet wisdom which the saintly author knew so well how to write. The reading soothed the excitement of the child's nerves, and under its gentle influence she fell into an easy slumber.

Meanwhile the messenger who had gone to the Hills had fulfilled his duty and within two hours had brought the wondering Agnes to the house of the Elaines. She was met by Miriam who showed her into the reception room and informed her of her sister's illness and of its cause.

"Did you know of this charge against your brother?" Miriam asked.

"I did know of it; but as it was entirely the result of a mistake, we came to the Hills in order to avoid any unnecessary questions. I now see that we have been deficient in our duty; but what would you have? To have made ourselves conspicuous would have done no good to any one, and we were always hoping to hear the word that would set us in a clearer light."

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"I believe you, Agnes. I recognize how easy it is to judge from a standpoint of safety. You would not have acted dishonorably, I know, and therefore I do not hold you culpable. But I cannot help but feel hurt that a confidence which so nearly concerned us should all this while have been withheld."

The conversation with Agnes helped wonderfully to soothe the nervousness of Miriam.

"Come," she said at length, "your presence will give heart to the poor child upstairs. I will tell her that your words have put a new light upon the affair. It will relieve her, and perhaps hasten her recovery."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IT was arranged around the little white bed in the upper room that Agnes should take up her residence with the Elaines until the return of her brother. Meanwhile a messenger would be despatched to the post and telegraph offices at the Hills, directing that all messages for Miss Brine should be forwarded to her new lodgings. These matters being settled to the satisfaction of all, the three young women spent the evening in delightful conversation. The history of Manley's case was gone over so repeatedly and so clearly that before long the Elaines knew its details almost as well as Agnes herself.

Their first horror of Manley's conduct changed rapidly into a sympathy and concern for him almost sisterly in its earnestness. There was one feature in the case that could not but cause an added feeling

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of interest on the part of the Elaines. Agnes had mentioned the name of Mr. Rogers.

"You say that this Mr. Rogers died two months ago?" Miriam asked reflectively.

"Yes."

"And tell me, was not his first name Leslie?"

"The same. Can it be possible that you know him?"

"Let me ask you another question. Where did this Leslie Rogers live?"

"I cannot tell exactly. I know it was in the town of Morton."

"Did you ever meet his sister?"

"I cannot say that I ever did."

Both Miriam and Florence now broke into a loud, joyful laugh that at first sounded rather out of place in an investigation of this character. Their explanation, however, not only set the matter right, but caused even Agnes herself to break through her customary solemnity with a radiant smile.

"Why, my dear Agnes! but no! Florence, I wish you would tell it."

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Agnes learned that Mr. Rogers was not dead, that he was the uncle of the Elaines, and that he was now in Scotland whither his sister, Madam Rogers, had gone to visit him.

“Oh, then!” exclaimed Agnes, springing to her feet and embracing Miriam in an ecstasy of happiness, “Manley is safe! safe! Did I not know it would eventually turn out well! He knows it by this time! and to-night, my dear girls, there is no happier man on earth than he.”

This ebullition of gladness communicated itself to the Elaines, who laughed and clapped their hands in their beaming enthusiasm. Florence had quite forgotten her illness, and had arisen from bed to join in the delightful revelry that made the room ring and that called the servants up from below in nervous anxiety.

When all was quiet again, and the servants were dismissed with the assurance that the girls were in their senses, Miriam called the little meeting to order.

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"Girls," she said, "is it not proper that in a moment of such sweet comfort we should cast ourselves upon our knees and return thanks to God who has shed His blessed light upon this last darkness of our souls? Let us say the rosary with all our hearts to-night."

Thereupon they knelt at the bedside, and poured forth like a song of triumph their repeated salutations to Mary, whose love, they doubted not, had obtained them this favor from the bounty of God.

The next morning after a late breakfast, for they had attended Mass, they sat out upon the veranda to await the coming of Mother Prudentia. She arrived quite early, and enjoyed the young women's delight as they told her the occurrences of the past day.

"I know, Mother," Miriam said, "that you will not be offended in finding that your consolations are no longer needed, for you must recognize as well as we, how the hand of God is shown in all these events. How happy I am that we were

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not so foolish as to murmur against the dispensations of Divine Providence!"

Mother Prudentia's countenance was grave as she answered: "My dear children, you should never forget this as long as life shall last. 'The Lord chastiseth them that He loveth' is a truer saying than we are inclined to believe. But be not overjoyous in your new-found happiness. You have tasted but little of the real bitterness of that cup which the children of God must drain before they are admitted into the fulness of His graces. Rather tremble, and pray that in the hour of real affliction, your souls may be made strong to breast the fury of sorrow, and to come forth from it like gold from the crucible."

She would have spoken more in this strain had she not perceived the depression her words had occasioned. She felt assured that her advice would not be forgotten, and so she hastened to raise their spirits by many a laughing jest and humorous anecdote. They begged her to stay longer

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than for a mere call, but she pleaded urgent business at the city convent, where they were expecting her. She was preparing to go when a messenger arrived with a telegram.

“For Miss Agnes Brine.”

Agnes took the paper, and when the boy had gone, she broke the envelope and read: “Come at once. All clear. Uncle very ill. Manley.”

The ladies now looked into each others' countenances with a puzzled query as to whether they should laugh for joy or grieve in sympathy.

“You must get ready at once, dear,” Mother Prudentia proposed, thus ending the suspense; “and we will all pray that if your uncle should be called away he may not go unprepared.”

Agnes was quickly in readiness, thanks to the Elaines, who in their heartfelt concern for her, had filled a satchel from their own wardrobes. The carriage, still waiting for Mother Prudentia, bore her off,

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while Miriam and Florence wept, not knowing whether for good or ill.

It was nearing noon when Agnes arrived at the residence in the city. She found the butler waiting to receive her.

"Manley is not here," he said. "'E's been up at the 'ospital all day. 'E tol' me to fetch you when you have some lunch."

Agnes was too impatient to wait for anything to eat.

"I had expected to find my uncle here," she said with a sigh of disappointment. "You had better procure a carriage at once, as I am anxious to go to him immediately."

At the hospital she found the patient very low. He was quite able to recognize her, however, and welcomed her with a smile quite foreign to his usual gloominess of features. When Agnes had come near to him he took her hands and affectionately kissed them. She bent down over his now quite livid face and impressed a kiss upon his forehead.

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“Do you forgive me, Agnes?” he asked in a husky whisper.

For answer the girl seated herself upon the edge of the bed and lifted his feverish head upon her arm.

“How happy you ought to be, uncle. They have told me you have made your peace with God.”

He nodded with eyes upturned as if drinking in the sweetness of her fond forgiveness. But as he at length turned away with a groan of pain she whispered into his ear, —

“Uncle, are you afraid?”

He seemed for a moment perplexed, but as he deemed it expedient in this solemn hour to tell the exact truth, he answered, —

“I have lived a wicked life, dear. I am afraid to meet my God after the evil I have done.”

“Has not God proved His love for you by giving you this great grace of reconciliation? You should excite yourself to love Him, and then you will not fear.”

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"Agnes," he said with a gentle pressure of her hand, and with a glance of gratitude in his eyes, "it is to your constant prayers I owe this. God has forgiven me because your goodness has pleaded for my conversion as its reward. May God bless you!"

He now looked eagerly about as one that seeks something. Manley, who was standing at the foot of the bed, came forward and stood beside his sister.

"Is there anything you wish, uncle?"

"I wanted you, Manley. It is so dark I could not see you. Have you told Agnes all?"

"She has heard it from the butler. She knows it all and will pray all the more for you."

The dying man now gave way to a fit of hysterical weeping, the effect of which was to cause his weakness to increase all the more rapidly. Finally he sank back gasping for breath, though yet holding the hands of the young people in his own.

The end was coming on, and the priest

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who had arrived administered the last Sacraments after which he began the recitation of the prayers for the dying, during which with many a petition for mercy upon his lips Evaristus finally yielded up his soul to God.

Manley led his sister away from the scene, and only when they were safely back in their old home, did he give way to the emotions that filled his heart. He had never entertained any solid affection for his uncle because of his unscrupulous life. He had never dreamed that the mercenary heart of such a man could soften to the sweet invitation of saving grace. Now, however, that he discovered this fountain of sentiment beneath the rubbish of worldly absorption, his feelings towards the memory of his uncle underwent a change. He that could not love him in his life for the evil he had done, found his heart afire with affection for the goodness that came to the surface in death.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE Elaines found the passing of the autumn days very tedious, although there was much to distract their attention in the care of the sick and poor, which they had taken upon themselves out of gratitude to God for His mercy in calling them back again to His love. Florence in her zeal had quite outstripped her elder sister, who had learned to spend many hours in quiet communion with God at the altar, or in the privacy of her room. It had occurred to the younger woman that a great amount of practical good might be accomplished if she could invite to her house every week four or five of the poorest children, giving them a share in her own dainty board and lodging. These young creatures, generally between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, she would seek personally in their homes and lead

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them, like one of the old-time saints, sweetly to her abode. There they would live from Sunday to Sunday a life of prayer relieved by amusement and industry. They attended school as regularly as at their own homes, and such as worked in the factories found their employment in no way hindered by their residence at the grand house. In the evenings they roamed through the woodlands gathering the leaves now mellowed and browned by the October weather, and sent them to their own homes to be held as souvenirs of their happy days at Glen Hill. There were games also at the Elaine house; and every Thursday evening a number of performers from the city theatres found access to the gatherings, giving in return some features of their histrionic genius.

Florence entitled her work the Guild of Mary and Martha, loving as she did to compare the exertions of her sister and herself to the ministrations of those dear friends of Our Lord. She had marvellous

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success in her work, so much so that the people as they beheld her each Sunday morning coming back from the Communion rail, blessed her with many a prayer and called her the little Saint Florence. The priests also recognized in her a valuable ally in diffusing a greater spirit of devotion among the young women of the parish, which was naturally followed by a more scrupulous purity of mind and a greater sense of true honor.

Miriam meanwhile had longed for the company of Agnes, from whom she heard frequently. The business of settling the estate after the funeral of her uncle had taken more time than they at first thought possible, so that it was well into the middle of October before the Brines were again at liberty.

They came as soon as convenient to call upon their old friends, and although they were charmed at the happiness that beamed from the countenances of the sisters, there was at the same time a pang of disap-

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pointment for Manley in the changed behavior of Florence. The child had always been noted for her demure disposition, and if she had before declared her admiration for the noble character of Manley Brine she had done so more by the expression of her eyes than by word of mouth.

One evening, as they sat beneath the spreading branches of an old elm, the conversation drifted to the different aspects of the states of life, and each of the assembled group, among whom were four of the children of the guild, was asked to name the occupation or condition which contained her ideal.

When it came to the turn of Florence, Manley bent forward with eager interest to hear what she might say.

"Speak boldly, Florence," her sister commanded laughingly.

She hesitated a moment as she looked up and caught the expression of Manley's countenance. A blush mantled her cheek as she stammered, —

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"I think it is the will of God that I should enter a convent."

A hush fell upon the little assemblage. To four of them there was deeper meaning in the girl's answer than might at first appear, while to Manley the very depths of its meaning were apparent. It was as if he had asked her himself to grant him the great favor for which his whole life yearned, and she had refused him absolutely. During the remainder of the evening his natural happiness was gone, and he sat like one asleep, answering only in monosyllables to the questions put to him, and very often giving answers without knowing what was asked.

Miriam, who comprehended his state of mind, brought the conversation to a close much earlier than usual. She felt deeply for the disappointment he must have experienced, but at the same time she would not utter a word to discourage the choice of her sister. "I feel that it is God's will," she thought. "But she will

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know in time if it be not so. If Manley be really worthy of her, he will wait."

That night she prayed more fervently, and it seemed as if the principal petitions she made were centred upon the unhappiness of her friend.

It was only when Manley had returned with Agnes to their home in the Hills, that for the first time he opened to her the secret of his heart. After what he had heard during this evening he had lost all hope in regard to Florence, and indeed, as he declared, there was for him no longer any light in the world. The darkness of the preceding months he could have borne even with happiness, could he know that the smile of Florence ever awaited to cheer him into hopefulness. And now that he had come out of the first darkness, a gloom more terrible hung about him, threatening the ruin of all future joy in life.

It was in vain that Agnes strove to comfort him with words that had succeeded upon other occasions of depression. Ever

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upon his consciousness, above the simple words of his sister, he heard that note of condemnation uttered by lips to him the most sacred in the world.

For many days he went about sad-eyed, permitting his business affairs, that since the death of his uncle had grown to considerable proportions, to lie unattended. He scarcely gave a thought to the fact, even when Agnes, in her fear for his commercial interests, was compelled to take up his work, answer his letters, and in general conduct his business.

“Come, Manley,” she said one day, “this will not do. You are losing your health as well as neglecting your affairs. Let us go to New York for a time, at least. Who knows that the determination of Florence is not a mere child’s caprice. Besides, did she not make it conditional upon the will of God? Have you lost confidence in the goodness of Him who has already drawn you out of the shadow of death? Can He no longer listen to

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prayer? Give up this cowardice, for such it is after all, and go to work manfully."

Manley was somewhat aroused by the strenuous words of his sister, and yielding to her suggestion he repaired with her to the bustling metropolis. There in an atmosphere of business, his love for work came back, and he could finally even think of Florence without any remarkable melancholy.

CHAPTER XL

TO Miriam and Florence the flight of the Brines came as the culmination to a period of anxiety. They had trusted so much in the aid which the brother and sister might give that they had even made changes in the usual routine of work, in order to accommodate such new efforts. When their friends came no more to Glen Hill, the girls began to wonder, until Miriam, in a moment of serious conversation, revealed to Florence the harm her hasty words had done.

“But what should I have said, Miriam?” she asked in her perplexity. “I honestly felt at the time that it was God’s will. I desired only to sacrifice what was so dear to me.”

“And are you still under that conviction? Do you think you are really worthy of such a grace?”

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“That is a different question, sister. I know, however, that if God wishes to grant me that grace He will aid me in making myself worthy.”

“But what would you say if it should become evident that God’s will lay in your accepting the regards of this young man ?”

“Oh, in that case I should not hesitate.”

“Are you aware that you have by your precipitate words made it impossible? You have driven him away. How would you accept him since he may never again give you the opportunity?”

The question came as a revelation to the mind of the child. She could not answer; her bewilderment was plainly depicted upon her countenance.

“Oh, what have I done, Miriam! If I had only reflected a little I might have seen my way. But do you think it is too late to rectify my mistake?”

“According to human ways it is far beyond rectifying. We can only again

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cast ourselves upon the goodness of God, and beg Him to teach us what to do."

That night Florence spent rather in weeping than in sleep. It was her very infatuation for Manley that had led her to the project of a great renunciation. She was frightened at her complete devotion to him as the ideal among the men of her acquaintance, and in the excess of her ardent love of God nothing appeared more appropriate as an offering upon His altar than this very heart-felt affection. She had never considered that her action was induced without necessary reflection, nor the difficulty of again re-establishing her relations with Manley once they were so thoroughly shattered. Thus, in the new knowledge of what she had done, her sorrow almost overwhelmed her with its bitterness.

The morning brought no consolation; for the sweet comfort of the Holy Mass could not reach her soul, oppressed as it was with feelings of self-reproach.

As the sisters were leaving the church

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they met with Father McIntire, who advanced towards them with a smile. He held in his hand a telegram.

"It is Father Daring," he said. "He has arrived at New York and will be here this evening. He has kept his coming secret, as he desired to avoid the unnecessary excitement of a public welcome."

Miriam thanked the priest. It was such good news, she declared, that it would lighten her work during the day.

They hurried home as quickly as possible and then repairing to their little oratory knelt down and thanked God for this new favor.

"How strange is this life of ours!" Miriam remarked. "It is but a varying succession of trials and comforts, profits and losses, hopefulness and despair, light and darkness. How foolish would one be to attempt to make it perfect as a final perfection. It is but the striving, the struggling of the imprisoned soul that seeks to cast off its earthly hindrances in order to

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enter that higher and nobler sphere where alone perfection can be found. We have suffered much; may God grant that His grace be ever present to aid us in those future trials which inevitably await us."

They were among the first that evening who met the beloved priest as he entered his house, and he treasured the comfort of their welcome more than words could tell.

"My dear children," he said, as he grasped their hands in a long, fervent clasp, "I have heard of your miracles during my trip abroad, and I assure you that your faces were ever before me like angels of consolation amid the strange experiences of foreign lands. Upon you the Holy Father has poured his choicest blessings, for I took good care to tell him of your good works, and I have prayed for you at every great shrine from here to Rome. You have kept the deposit of the faith that I left in your care, and no doubt you have increased its fruitfulness a hundred-fold."

The young women were deeply affected

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at the earnest words of their beloved director and found it impossible to answer him intelligibly for the tears that choked their voices. He understood, however, the depth of their affectionate welcome and cheered them into gaiety by the fund of anecdotes and droll stories that he had gathered up during his travels. That he had profited much by the excursion was evident from the absence of the cough that, a few months previously, had alarmed his friends.

When, on the following day, he found time to visit them at Glen Hill, they made use of the occasion to go over again all that had transpired in the interval of his absence, ever laying the tribute of gratitude at the feet of God and His Blessed Mother.

Father Daring was shown the admirable workings of Florence's new guild, and when some of its members, four bright girls of the parish, were brought to him, he blessed them, the tears meanwhile coursing down his cheeks. "You have made your house,

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indeed, a house of prayer," he said, "and the spirit of God surely watches over it. Go on, then, my children, and may the blessing of the Lord be ever upon you!"

It was Thursday, and Father Daring gladly came to the little concert that was given that night by some musicians from the city. The music was choice, and the selections did honor to the recognized musical knowledge of the pastor.

"This is like a page from the lives of the saints," he said as he was leaving. "Yet be not proud, my dears, of your great success. Remember that the cup of happiness contains much bitterness, that the great light makes the succeeding darkness all the more dense. Pray to God to direct you, and you will not want for light."

CHAPTER XLI

MEANWHILE the time was at hand when they might expect the arrival of their dear aunt, who had telegraphed a week before, that she was about to take passage on the Africa, a vessel that sailed between Glasgow and Halifax. On arriving at this latter port, Madam would travel the rest of the way by train.

Every morning Miriam telephoned to the company's office in hopes of information, but always with the same result, no news.

One morning after she had returned from Mass she was sitting at breakfast with Florence when the servant brought in the morning paper. As was usual with her she prepared to cast her eyes hurriedly through its columns in search of whatever news might be of interest to her. As

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she opened the fold of the paper her eyes fell upon a heavily printed item, —

“ LOST! THE AFRICA !

“ The steamer ‘ Africa,’ from Glasgow for Halifax, was lost last night in the fog near the Magdalen Islands. It is believed that all on board went down with her as there is no trace of any living being in the vicinity of the wreck.”

Florence, who usually paid little attention to her sister during the reading of the newspaper, was now engaged upon some dreamy calculations in regard to her charitable expenses. She had not noticed when the paper fell from her sister’s hands, and Miriam white with faintness, sank back into her chair. She looked up presently to ask a question, and beheld the condition of her sister.

The household was aroused, the pensioners, as she called her little protégés, came running breathlessly into the room, and every means was employed in order to resuscitate the unconscious young woman.

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It was only after a quarter of an hour of such work that she at length awoke, and when she finally realized her situation she drew Florence close to her side and whispered,—

“It is the darkness again, Florence. The light is gone out. It is the storm, the angry tempest. Oh, pray, pray to God to lead us into the light.”

She lay back upon her pillow, and Florence with the aid of her young friends began the rosary.

The news of the morning papers, together with the list of the unfortunate victims of the disaster brought Father Daring to the afflicted children. He found Miriam, though still very weak, yet able to converse fearlessly upon the sad topic. She had grown resigned, and in her resignation could lessen the blow as it fell upon her weaker sister. The good priest did all in his power to comfort them, promising to send for the particulars to the company's office. Mother Prudentia, who had

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known Madam Rogers, came before the day was ended, and brought with her the sympathies of the nuns.

The news travelled through the parish with the greatest rapidity. Everywhere were heard words of the sincerest pity, while in many a poor tenement the hard-working children of toil brushed away a tear and murmured a prayer. The members of the guild came in the evening with a basket of choice flowers, and sang a sweet hymn of prayer for the dead.

Nothing, however, could bring real consolation to the bewildered girls. All night long they sat side by side in wide-eyed sleeplessness, recounting from time to time the many things of interest they remembered in the life of their aunt. They prayed indeed, not only for the repose of her soul, but also for that light and guidance which would lead them safely through the terrible trial.

The solemn Mass of Requiem was sung at St. Placidus, as soon as fuller information

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had dispelled all hopeful doubts. Father Daring spoke some feeling words over the empty catafalque, and exhorted the young sisters anew to be resigned to God's will.

It was that evening, as Miriam and her sister were discussing the words of the priest, that Florence all at once exclaimed as if under the spell of an inspiration :

“ Oh, Miriam ! I see all now. I should not have sacrificed poor Manley ; our true sacrifice will be that of our grief for dear Aunt Mary. That indeed shall be a sacrifice of the soul, and under its influence we shall see more clearly the guidance of the Light. No more weeping, then, over the crosses of life. No more wandering except when our hands are clasped within the Hand that leads to light eternal.”

CHAPTER XLII

THE decision of Florence set the direction of the course she was to pursue in the future, to which Miriam, in her earnest desire to act with strict neutrality, gave her consent. It was determined that the life of the two sisters should for the present be reduced to a more private retirement. Acting under the suggestion of Father Daring and of Mother Prudentia, they purchased a house in the Hills, where they might be in constant communication with the dear sisterhood that had, from the first, shown them so much genuine affection. They did not mean by this to abandon their long cherished plans for a well-instituted guild in the city, and accordingly they resigned, for this purpose, their house on Glen Hill, which, under the direction of Father Daring and a select committee, should be utilized as a temporary home for the poor children of the parish.

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The plans finally adjusted to the satisfaction of the sisters, on a pleasant day in November they went out with their *lares* and *penates* to the little white mansion in the woods.

Their house-warming was simple in the extreme. Father Daring came out to lunch, and brought with him the Brines, who had only then heard of the awful disaster. It was a meeting fraught with tender remembrances, and brought substantial consolation to the mourners. Agnes was especially assiduous in her devotion to her friends, permitting no opportunity to pass without saying a word or doing an action by which the thoughts of her hostesses might be lifted above their affliction. Manley himself hung back as if in shame for his long desertion; but the open-heartedness of the Elaines put him at ease, and he began to feel again as he had felt in those dear days of the summer.

Mother Prudentia came over in the afternoon from the Academy, bringing with her a troop of the school-children, all eager to

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greet the lovely young ladies who had become Catholic in their little chapel.

And so the day wore on, full to the end with loving words and kindly acts, until the evening shadows reminded the visitors that it was time to depart. Manley lingered a little behind the others, until he found himself side by side with Florence. He looked to her with a glance of questioning, to which she answered in words, —

“Manley, you will come soon again, will you not? We have looked for you so often and you cannot know the disappointment we felt when it became evident that you were determined to stay away.”

“Did you really miss — us, so much? It was a severe trial for us to remain away; but we had concluded that our presence would be prejudicial to the project you had in mind.”

“What project do you mean?”

“You informed us, on that last evening at your house, that it was your hope to enter the convent.”

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“Yes, I remember. I spoke, at the time, without thought. I have become convinced since then that I have never been called to such a life. It requires greater graces than I have received.”

They had come to the turning of the road, where it would be necessary for the sisters to turn back, and Manley, whose heart was now filled with immense hope, went away with the promise of calling frequently in the future.

The Elaines settled down at once to the life they had planned. It was to be one mostly of prayer, intermingled with close study upon the great truths of the religion they had embraced. The mind of Florence, being built upon the lines of sentiment, found its chief solace in the lives of the great woman saints. She grew to admire the majesty that glowed in the exalted devotion of a Clare, a Teresa, or a St. Catharine, though she lingered longest over the pathetic virtues of the dear Queen of Hungary. She read these lives more for

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the deep solace their virtues brought to her heart than out of any desire of imitating their extraordinary devotions.

Miriam took up a more solid line of reading. Being naturally of a philosophic cast of mind she found unbounded interest in the works of Balmes, of De Maistre, and of Cardinal Newman. She plunged into the depths of metaphysics and ethics, and learned the foundations upon which naturally the structure of Catholic belief is built. What charmed her most was the logical order and sequence of thought, so different from the disjointed and wandering assertions of the agnostics. She felt, when she had concluded one of these studies, that she had, as it were, been building up within her mind, stone by stone a temple of surprising magnificence, the worthy outcome of thoughts inspired by divine faith. Her strength in the doctrines of the Church grew greater day by day until, in some discussions with Father Daring, the latter was fain to declare her an accomplished theologian.

CHAPTER XLIII

ONE day as she was walking pensively in the garden of the convent the thought came to her that if she were, as her philosophy had told her, created for some definite purpose to be reached by some definite means, it was clearly her duty to discover that end and those means. Where should she study the nature and possibilities of that final end? Again her philosophy told her, in God alone. In Him only should the mind find the complete, the eternal fulfilment of its hopes. But she was not satisfied. She must know God through the means of her nature, in the actual flesh and blood. It was history and tradition, with the Bible, that now spoke to her of the Lord Jesus Christ, the ideal and the model of all mankind as well as the realization of the

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Divinity in the nature of man. All these fundamental truths, she had learned and pondered over. She was yet ignorant of the immediate means by which she might attain to the union with God. Here she seemed to grope in the veriest darkness. What must be her life if she would be made worthy of such a fulfilment as would consist in the vision of God ?

Upon this point she thought deeply, praying incessantly, and reading the lives of such as had before her time met the question, and answered it with success.

When she spoke with Mother Prudentia, that good lady refused to interfere upon so important a point.

“There is one who knows you better than I. Go to him, tell him your difficulty, and I am sure he will know how to direct you.”

And so Miriam came again to the parlor at Father Daring's, and laid her problem before him. As a man of long experience he knew almost intuitively the state in life

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to which divine grace was calling her. He preferred, however, to question her first, as if to indicate more clearly to her mind wherein lay her duty.

“Tell me, my child; what would you do for God, were He to come here this moment and beg a favor from you?”

“I do not know what I should do in the actual circumstances; but I think I should fall at His feet and say: ‘My Lord, Thou hast given me all that I am; take, then, all that I am, and all that I desire to be.’”

“In other words, you would consecrate yourself to God.”

“Most assuredly, Father.”

“Have you ever felt that you would like to consecrate yourself?”

“I should esteem it the summit of all happiness, were I convinced that I were worthy to be accepted in such an act.”

“My child, I have less doubt that the sun is shining than I have that God has called you. For you there will be no real happiness outside the walls of the cloister.

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You have asked my advice; I only say, obey the voice of God."

"Would you have me enter the convent?"

"Can you serve God in the world?"

"It has many temptations for me, Father, and I have once followed it into unbelief."

"Then, Miriam, enter the house of God. There alone will you find that light for which you have been seeking, that happiness which is beyond all mortal ken."

Father Daring was usually brief and decisive in his discussions, and when he had settled a point, he would drop it once for all.

Miriam accepted his advice without more question. When she went back to Mother Prudentia, and informed her of the conclusion to which she had come, that good woman with true motherly love embraced her, and thanked God that in His goodness He had at length brought His child to her home.

CHAPTER XLIV

THERE was but little in the way of preparation to be done, that she might cast off the old ties and bind herself forever to her eternal spouse. For several months she should spend her time as a postulant, as one knocking at the door behind which lay the fulfilment of all her hopes.

One thing, however, remained to be done ere the gates should close behind her forever. Like one about to die she should gather once more around her those dear friends in the city who had remained true to her out of the débris of her once wide acquaintanceship, and tender her last adieus.

Father Daring had arranged for this, so that it should take the form of a quiet reception at the old Glen Hill house, a slight lunch, a pressure of the hand, and then the parting.

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It was but a few days before the Feast of All Saints, on a mild, balmy October afternoon, while the russet yet lingered on the foliage, or upon the million leaves that spread like a carpet over meadow and lawn. The sun was just setting as Miriam and her friends gathered in the drawing-room after the half-silent repast, and every one felt that a supreme moment had entered into their lives. Many of the guests still regarded the hostess as the unfortunate victim of a pretty delusion; they had not yet learned to divest themselves of that ignorant prejudice which because it cannot understand, refuses to believe. They parted with her, therefore, as with one devoted to misfortune, and went their way to think of her no more. Some wept, indeed, but with those tears of admiration excited by the contemplation of sublime actions.

When all, at length, were gone Miriam found herself alone with the venerable priest and her dear Florence.

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"Oh, Father," she said, "I feel as if the peace of all the world were in my heart. The world has just vanished out of those doors, and from this on I am to belong only to God."

They knelt down in the shadow of the fireplace beneath the outstretched arms of the Virgin Mother and recited the *Te Deum* with voices low but full of earnestness. In the midst of their prayer a servant entered bearing a card upon a salver. Miriam took it and read, —

"Mr. Geoffrey Daunt."

"Show him in, Thomas. I am glad I shall have an opportunity to see the poor boy once again."

The servant returned after a moment to say that Mr. Daunt was unwilling to enter the house. He had something of importance to communicate to the lady, and would be obliged if she would kindly come out upon the veranda for a moment.

Miriam shrugged her shoulders and bade Thomas go and signify her willingness to

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accede to this strange request. Father Daring laughed pleasantly.

"He is evidently unwilling to come into contact with a Catholic priest."

"That is just what it means, Father," Miriam agreed smilingly, as she threw a wrap across her shoulders and went out of the room.

She found Geoffrey leaning against one of the pillars that upheld the roof of the veranda; his face was turned away, and his hands were plunged into his pockets. He might have posed, as he stood there, for a figure of gloomy despair, or complete dejection.

Miriam, who had been hurrying as rapidly as possible retarded her pace as she beheld the disposition of her old friend. She went very near to him, yet paused as if she feared some unknown danger from those fiercely frowning brows.

"You wished to meet me, Mr. Daunt."

He turned to her slowly, almost majestically.

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“It did not use to be ‘Mr. Daunt;’ it once was ‘Geoffrey,’ but since they have stolen you away they have taught you not only to act with hostility, but even to speak in enmity to me.”

“But — but — Mr. Geoffrey — why do you talk like this?”

“Why talk like this? Do you dare to ask it, madam? — you! — you who have robbed me of my peace, of all hope? You might have lived as you liked with me, Catholic or Protestant or infidel, it mattered not; you might have led me along with you, saved me, brought me with you into this heaven you work so hard to gain. For you I should have accepted all things, — become a very saint, an ornament of your Church had you but desired it. But what have you done, Miss Elaine? Have you any conception of it? You have pronounced the words that have condemned my soul forever. You may have lifted your own spirit to the throne of God, but mine you have cast into the blackest Hell.”

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Miriam had expected to hear some words of reproach. She had divined as much the moment her eyes had fallen upon the gloomy countenance of Daunt. She had not, however, looked for the torrent of anger and blame that poured now from lips never before known to utter words unbecoming of the most polished refinement. In the extremity of her anxiety she began to shed tears, to sob with her clasped hands folded upon her breast.

“Oh, Geoffrey! You poor boy! I never had an idea that I could cause you so much pain. But, Geoffrey, be courageous!”

“Courageous! Another of your hypocritical phrases. When you have driven me mad you wish to intensify your cruelty by bidding me bear it bravely! But you shall not triumph over me! I swear it, by the heavens above! You have done me an eternal wrong, and you shall answer for it.”

“But, Geoffrey,” she pleaded, now thoroughly alarmed, “did I ever really do you a harm?”

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"You became a Catholic," he sneered, "that you might destroy my hopes in you, — and when I still hoped —"

"Oh, Geoffrey, I had thought you had forgotten your old feelings!"

"Never! I remembered them, and still hoped. But now you have determined by this insensate consecration of yours to kill my hope forever."

"Mr. Daunt, be careful! You have already said more than a gentleman could."

"I care not what you may say or think now. You taunt me with ungentlemanliness. Let it be so! What use has one about to die for the arts of courtesy?"

"Geoffrey Daunt!"

"Yet not alone I shall die." As he spoke he turned squarely toward the pale, frightened woman. "You have destroyed my life, Miriam Elaine, and I have sworn to destroy yours. I have waited, I have hoped for this moment, and now that it is here I shall not hesitate to employ it to its best value. Do you desire to know

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the price this desertion of yours will cost you?"

"It was no desertion. You have not, Mr. Daunt, and never did have any right to speak in this way."

Geoffrey Daunt now appeared like one under the spell of a fierce delirium. His eyes blazing with anger were fixed upon the shrinking girl as a serpent would regard a helpless bird; his lips were drawn into thin lines, between which his white, clenched teeth showed themselves as if ready to emit the hiss of death. With a bound he came nearer to her, and in his outstretched hand he held a pistol. Miriam shut out the sight from her eyes and uttering a scream of fright recoiled against the house. There was a sudden explosion, a flash, and she knew no more.

Geoffrey Daunt stood with his smoking weapon looking down upon the prostrate form of his victim. Then as he heard footsteps approaching from the house he turned, first, as if to escape, then, looking

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back upon his work, he again raised the revolver.

“What after all is life?” he cried with a hoarse laugh. “For her it might be the promise of golden eternities; for me, it is this—” He placed the muzzle of the revolver to his ear and fired.

Father Daring and Florence just then emerged from the house to contemplate the completion of the tragedy.

CHAPTER XLV

THE wound had not proved immediately fatal, as was at first supposed. Miriam rallied, so that after a few days she was sufficiently strong to sit up. It was on that day that she had begged of Mother Prudentia, who had visited her, to permit her to return again to the convent.

“Of course, my dear child,” the good sister answered. “You belong in a manner to us, and so your place will be with us as long as you desire.”

And so she was carried tenderly to the dear convent, and placed in one of those clean white rooms she had admired so much in her former visit.

The news of her illness created sadness of heart throughout the convent. In the class-rooms, whither the children had been summoned by silent signals, the prayer of

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innocence went up, begging God to spare His useful servant, and a special rosary was recited, that Our Lady might use her intercession with her divine Son in this regard.

It was first thought that the wound might easily be overcome by means of the usual care and remedies; but although the best physicians were called, and every conceivable effort resorted to, the inflammation increased alarmingly. It was during one of her hours of unconsciousness that the sufferer turned to the Mother Superior, and said in a voice full of happiness, —

“I believe I am going now, Mother dear. Now, indeed I hear the voice of the Lord calling to me; only, you must pray that I weaken not in the passing.”

Mother Prudentia, though alarmed at the expression of a thought that was in her own mind, suppressed her feelings, and endeavored to distract the mind of her child from the thought of impending death, an effort in which she was seconded by

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Father Daring, who had hastened, at the first news, to the bedside of his young protégée. Florence also had heard the sad prediction, and in the desolation it brought sank down upon her knees by the side of the Mother Superior, burying her face in the good sister's apron.

The increasing weakness of Miriam now seemed to give credibility to her words, and the physician, when he arrived, shook his head sorrowfully. He called the Superior out of the room, with Father Daring and Florence.

"It is my duty to tell you," he said, "that the girl is dying."

Florence threw herself at his feet. "Oh, Doctor," she cried in her distraction, "can you not do something! Save her, oh, save her! She must not die!"

She was comforted somewhat by the caresses of Mother Prudentia, and the severe commands of the priest, who represented to her how wicked it would be to fly into the face of God's holy will.

The Awakening

“Have you forgotten, Florence,” he asked, “that you once declared yourself ready to make any sacrifice to please God?”

“Oh, I know it, Father. But this—I never thought of this.”

“Nevertheless, my dear child, this is precisely the sacrifice the good God calls upon you now to make. If the parting were forever, you might indeed weep your eyes out, and I should not blame you. But you are a Catholic, and you know that your sister leaves you only to prepare your place when you shall follow her later.”

Florence felt the comfort of Father Darling’s words, and drying her tears, promised to suppress her emotions in the presence of Miriam, lest she excite sorrow where now there was only heavenly joy.

Together they again entered the room. Miriam was now seated up in bed resting against the uplifted pillows. She beckoned to Mother Prudentia.

The Awakening

"Mother," she said, "I have yet one more favor to ask of you before I go."

"What is it, my child? Ask anything, and if it is possible you shall have it."

"Perhaps you will not like it. I have a longing to salute my Saviour in His tabernacle once more. Oh, Mother, take me down to the chapel, so that I may die under the shadow of the Real Presence."

"We will see, my dear."

Mother Prudentia consulted with Father Daring, who, while he considered it out of the question to place the dying girl directly in the chapel, saw no difficulty in having her carried to the little octagonal room, the doors of which, on being opened, permitted a view of the whole altar. The physician found no objections to the scheme, and the good news was at once communicated to Miriam, who received it with happiness. A bed was erected in this antechamber, and in a few minutes the sufferer was borne down the stairs to the accompaniment of bitter tears.

The Awakening

The exhaustion consequent upon the removal was of short duration, and again the sick girl, at the thought that her eyes were actually gazing upon the abode of her Sacramental Lord, awoke to a radiant brightness that quite deceived the onlookers.

She prayed with an excess of fervor until the sister infirmarian, noting that her enfeebled powers stood in need of quiet, begged her to become more passive, until her strength should return.

“What need, sister dear,” she said, “to treasure up bodily strength now, when I am so near the end! Let me speak to my Lord while I may, and you also pray for me. Pray to our dear Mother Mary, that she may stand here near me to make my soul strong, and then I shall not need for bodily strength.”

They perceived that it pleased her to pour out her heart in words of love to her Sacramental Lord, and they hindered her no more. And when she had prayed long and had felt her soul flooded with the

The Awakening

sweetness of divine consolation, she suddenly became aware of the presence of her sister standing tearful beside her.

"Florence," she said, "you are in pain over this. Do not weep for me. I go to fulfil my life, even as I have hoped in the midst of our trials. But tell me, Florence, have you yourself determined how you shall live best in order to please God?"

Florence found it impossible to answer through the tears that choked all utterance. She could only bend down and kiss the perspiring forehead of her sister.

"Tell me, Florence," the patient asked again as if she were resolved to know.

"Yes, Miriam, my darling! You must not fear for that. I have chosen my life and I have the blessing of Father Daring upon it."

"Ah, Florence, I know what it is. I have prayed to God so often for it. But where is Manley? Where is Agnes? I should like to speak with them before I die."

The Awakening

Manley was shown into the room followed by his weeping sister.

“Manley,” she asked in her sweet way, “is it really so, that you are going to care for my dear sister when I am gone?”

“With God’s help, my good lady, she shall not want for my care and love while life shall last. You yourself know how we feel for each other.”

“Then I am thankful. It will make my passing easier to know that you will be united.”

She now looked slowly from Manley to Florence as if measuring their suitableness for one another, and at the end of her scrutiny she took their hands and said with a cheerful voice, —

“May God bless you both! I leave you under His watchful care. And you, Father Daring, will you be a friend to them as always before?”

The priest came forward, and stroking her clammy forehead with his aged hand, accepted the trust she had reposed in him.

The Awakening

“Be not afraid,” he said. “While you look upon them with prayer from your home with God no evil can befall them.”

She smiled under the force of his gentle words and tremblingly placed her cold hand in his.

It was now growing into night upon the vigil of All Saints. In the darkness that was quickly adding to her growing blindness she could yet perceive the lights that burned upon the altar beside the Tabernacle. She had confessed in the early morning, and now with a love born of excess of faith, she welcomed into her heart the Body and Blood of her Lord. She felt the saving Unction upon her senses and heard the words of the final absolution spoken by the tongue of her dear confessor. Then in the hush that followed, broken by the whispered prayers for the dying, she raised herself upon her side and gazing into the chapel cried out,—

“See, it is there! Oh, sisters, oh, Father, I see it, coming from afar away, growing—

The Awakening

growing — clearer and clearer. It is a brightness, a sublime Cross. It has come from Calvary. It is coming to me! It beckons me. Now after dreams of fright and sadness, Thou comest at length to usher in that happy dawn that shall be ever with Thee an eternal Awakening.”

THE END

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